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THE SWARMING LOGIC OF INVERSION AND THE ELEVATION OF SATAN

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'I beseech you the executioners, crucify me thus, with the head downward and not otherwise . . . Learn ye the mystery of all nature, and the beginning of all things, what it was. For the first man, whose race I bear in mine appearance (or, of the race of whom I bear the likeness), fell (was borne) head downwards, and showed forth a manner of birth such as was not heretofore: for it was dead, having no motion. He, then, being pulled down—who also cast his first state down upon the earth—established this whole disposition of all things, being hanged up an image of the creation wherein he made the things of the right hand into left hand and the left hand into right hand, and changed about all the marks of their nature, so that he thought those things that were not fair to be fair, and those that were in truth evil, to be good. Concerning which the Lord saith in a mystery: Unless ye make the things of the right hand as those of the left, and those of the left as those of the right, and those that are above as those below, and those that are behind as those that are before, ye shall not have knowledge of the kingdom.'
 —The Acts of Peter

Mazdak's followers were planted there head down, with their feet in the air, like trees. . . . If you have any sense, you will not follow Mazdak's way.
 —Firdawsi, *Shahnameh*

Nailed at the heart of many a logo, suspended from the neck, held out in Satanic blessing: The inverted cross is one of black metal's anti-icons. The antithesis of a revelation of light, it signifies an originary blasphemy. The elevation of Satan (in

orthodox or psycho-symbolic terms) as the one worthy of adoration is inevitably cast in terms of a desecration of God and all that is divine, a celebration of impious sacraments. Forsaking ascension and mining a path towards the centre of the earth, black metal finds a satanic stain lodged at the core of being.

However, the significance of this movement is not bound by a simple reversal. The inverted cross hangs above a swarming logic of inversion: the overturning of Christianity, but also a mimesis of Christian self-desecration (embodied in St. Peter's insistence on being crucified upside down as a sign of fallen humanity); the rejection of certain forms of religion, but also of modernity's pallid enlightenment; the invocation of strange gods of the earth, even as the earth is cursed.

When thought becomes poison, it is no longer so easy to determine which way is up and which way is down. To throw down one's head, to push oneself into the cursed earth, to occupy the place of the inverted crucified: Is this to think-by-not-thinking an unconditioned rapture beyond negation and affirmation? Is inversion other than merely turning a hierarchy upside down? A more troubling subversion? And what is the place of inversion itself? Around what point or pivotal no-place is it possible?

> I answer that, nothing should be denied the blessed that belongs to the per-fection of their beatitude. Now everything is known the more for being compared with its contrary, because when contraries are placed beside one another they become more conspicuous. Wherefore in order that the happi-ness of the saints may be more delightful to them and that they may render more copious thanks to God for it, they are allowed to see perfectly the suf-ferings of the damned.[1]

There is an economy of inversion. Contraries reinforce one another. For Aquinas, following the logic of salvation to its bitter end, it made perfect sense that the bliss of paradise will be made complete by the view it provides of the torments of souls in hell. The damned, in their own way, exhibit the perfect justice of God. The blessed will not take direct pleasure in the suffering of those being punished, but "will rejoice in the punishment of the wicked, by considering therein the order of divine justice and their own deliverance, which will fill them with joy. And thus the divine justice and their own deliverance will be the direct cause of the joy of the blessed: while the punishment of the damned will cause it indirectly."[2]

The Christian narrative, the narrative of salvation par excellence, is structured by repeated acts of exclusion or abjection. These are the necessary conditions, the constitutive work, whereby its universalism is established and affirmed. It is the

new covenant displacing the old and setting in train a political and historical process of self-definition. In the process it creates its abjected other as "Jew," "Gnostic," "Heretic," "Savage." The other is always dark, the dark body of the Satanic, whose expulsion from heaven is intrinsic to heaven's order. However, this also means that Satan never truly leaves. The demonic haunts the divine.

Such a line of interpretation will no doubt be anathema to the orthodox Christian theologian, for whom God is not defined by any dualism, any co-primordiality of evil. God, as pure act, is perfectly realized goodness, depending on nothing. Evil is a privation, a deficiency always secondary to and parasitic upon the good.

It has always been a problem for such a theology to account for why and how God relates to the world. As pure act, God cannot be passive to anything, cannot receive anything. At the same time, the act of creation must be a wholly free act, not a necessary emanation from God, since the latter would compromise God's sovereignty and perfection.

Aquinas allows for contingent creatures, including free beings such as humans, to have genuine causal power, whilst insisting that the sovereign purposes of divine providence can never be frustrated. The contingency of the world is therefore affirmed, but its submission to God's necessary will is also upheld. Creation is a free act of God, but no act of God can be simply contingent. The will of God is eternal, and cannot be separated from God's nature. The doctrine of divine simplicity maintains that all God is, God is essentially. Therefore, the will to create is co-eternal with God. How then, can it be distinguished from God's necessary essence?

Two unpalatable (from the point of view of orthodoxy) alternatives present themselves. One is to deny the simplicity or perfection of God, to introduce division, contingency, and temporality into the heart of the divine (a line that may run through various Western traditions, such as those associated with the term "Gnosticism," the Kabbalah, and the speculative metaphysics of Schelling and Whitehead). The other is to maintain God's simplicity in pure indifference to the world, much like the Aristotelian Unmoved Mover.

Rejecting these, orthodoxy rests on the horns of its Satanic dilemma: God is almost blissfully ignorant of the devilish logic of creation. No creation without certain potentials realised, and others denied. No creation without a "No" that shadows the "Yes." No creation without the corruption of divine necessity.

In order to protect the divine essence, and to secure God's role in the drama of salvation which unfolds in a fallen world, the shadow must be castigated as arbitrary, unreal, and anarchic. The hard of heart, the unbeliever, and the

impenitent play their appointed role. The damned hold a mirror up for the beatific vision to behold its own completion. And behind the mirror? On the obverse? What makes this reflection possible?

Writing on the death drive in Freud's work, Derrida captures the economy of salvation as an economy of abjection and inversion:

> We do not like to be reminded, Freud notes, of the undeniable existence of an evil which seems to contradict the sovereign goodness of God. But if this Devil—another proper name for the three-named drive—seems, then, in the eyes of Christians, for "Christian science" (in English in the text), irreconcilable with God, we see now that it can also exculpate God: evil for evil's sake, diabolical evil, the existence of the Devil can serve as an excuse (*Entschuldigung*) for God, because *exterior* to him, *anarchic angel and dissident*, in rebellion against him, just as, and this is the polemical trait of analogy, the Jew can play the analogous role of economic relief or exoneration . . . assigned to him by the world of the Aryan ideal. In other words, the radical destruction can again be *reinvested* in another logic, in the inexhaustible *economistic* resource of an archive which capitalizes everything, even that which ruins it or radically contests its power: radical evil can be of service, infinite destruction can be reinvested in a theodicy, the devil can also serve to *justify*—such is the destination of the Jew in the Aryan ideal.[3]

In the face of this, black metal plays an ambiguous role. It stands with the dark body of the abjected: Satan, the earth, evil. It scorns Christianity, but also the Western modernity which could be seen as the product of Christian universalism. It directly allies itself with the Satanic, or else with pagan and esoteric traditions suppressed by the church.

At the same time, we have to ask critically about the dimensions of this inversion. Turning the cross upside down is not in itself an escape from the orthodox Christian logic of salvation. The Christian God can empty himself, desecrate himself, and yet remain fundamentally untouched, pure, and sovereign. The gesture of vulnerability, of allowing freedom and evil to conspire on the outside, is a sleight of hand, for the exterior is quickly made to serve and confirm the Origin.

Take, as an example, the motif of sovereignty itself. The figure of the Emperor, which strides through the lyrical world of the band of the same name, is clearly Satanic, a rejection of the "weakness" of Christian submission and pity:

Thou are the Emperor of Darkness.
Thou are the king of howling wolves.
Thou hath the power to force any light in wane. Sans mercy.
Sans compassion nor will to answer whoever asketh the why.[4]

The Emperor is demonic, but also divine. In a sense, this Satan replicates the unyielding providence of God. It is without pity, much like the saints viewing the torments of the damned. One wonders if the black metallic spite reserved for the Christian church should not be turned into praise. After all, hasn't the church at times exercised this merciless subjugation, its story of salvation intertwining with that of Western colonialism? Why look for Satan to do what God *has already done*?

The economy of inversion repeats itself, in uncanny conformation of Derrida's words about "the destination of the Jew in the Aryan ideal." From the (now erased) notorious epitaph on Darkthrone's *Transilvanian Hunger* ("Norwegian Aryan Black Metal") through the twisted threads of Varg Vikernes' Odinist racism and NSBM, hatred of the Jew has been the most explicit regurgitation of Christianity's own dark side. In this case, inversion has become a continuation of anti-Semitism by other means.

However, this clearly does not tell the whole story. The power of inversion is not merely that of a parodic reversal.[5] The collapsing of light into darkness opens a new way for thought, one that is not simply in search of a new sovereign. It is a way that points beyond the salvation narrative and towards an identification with the earth in its reality, in its corruption. No longer is a pure core of identity kept safe, whether by conquest or abjection. The black metal soul opens its sound, its scream, and its vision (its *theoria*) to an impurity which is primordial, creative, and self-affirming.

This can take place in different ways. Deathspell Omega's explicit miming of Christian liturgy and scriptural language serves a metaphysical Satanism in which God is entirely displaced by the reality named Satan, but this happens via an audible and theoretical corrosion which disturbs the theological edifice from within, exposing its hidden fault lines. In other words, what we get is not simply a replacement of God / good with Satan / evil, but a more deconstructive cross-contamination of the two.[6]

A very different example would be the "renihilation" championed by Hunter Hunt-Hendrix of the band Liturgy, in which black metal betrays its Nordic roots and "transforms Nihilism into Affirmation."[7] This specifically American aesthetic is a building from the ground up, a celebration of creative, ecstatic, forward momentum, rather than a nostalgic lament for things lost. We could also examine

the nature-oriented anarchism of Cascadian black metal, which eschews Satanic emblems for a sensuous affirmation of the (often putrid) earth devoid of masters.[8]

None of these examples are beyond critical evaluation, of course. They face problematic issues of appropriating narratives from, variously, Christian liturgy, American exceptionalism, and indigenous traditions. Nevertheless, they perform a different form of inversion to the one which involves exchanging one sovereign, transcendent principle for another. They affirm an immanent movement which is always excessive to that which can be defined by the transcendence-immanence binary. Such a movement is courageous, corrosive, joyful, indifferent, disillusioned, and fecund in decay. It echoes the mystical-heretical coincidence of the self with the absolute, experienced not simply as a pure ascent, but as the darkness, heaviness, and aridity of being itself.

Nicola Masciandaro, discussing the scriptural account of the darkness that fell over the earth during crucifixion and Jesus' cry of dereliction ("My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"), argues that "Whatever the theological truth of the abandonment signified, in the intensive reality of the question—a reality more real than the real it questions—there is no abandonment whatsoever.[9]" The actuality of the question speaks for itself, with no reference to an answer or a beyond from which an answer could come. The darkness and the question expose the abyss at the heart of everything, and yet

> the infinitely ordinary yet equally miraculous capacity of the question not only to indicate this eternal negativity, but, in the non-difference of its own substantial negativity, to speak it, is a superessential positivity, an affirmation beyond affirmation and denial. The actuality of the radical question of divine dereliction, what makes it radical in the first place, lies in its fulfillment of the superessentiality of negation, the apophatic principle that "the negations are not simply the opposites of the affirmations."[10]

This is the core of a sorrow that marks being itself in its intertwined abandonment and affirmation. For Masciandaro, "sorrow itself, internally, is a kind of supernatural or magical problem, a problem whose problematicity, if actually understood, abolishes all problems and inverts today into paradise."[11]

This inversion is a turning on the spot, a drilling down into the immanent ground. It is sorrow as affirmation, despair as a wild courage. The black metal scream and sound—whittling death metal's bombast to its razor sharp edge—is this corroding question without an answer, except its own intensity. From its

hellish stance, head beating downwards, it refuses the teleology of salvation and opens up a new sonic space. The economy of inversion is itself suspended.

These are the spiralling questions around which this special issue turns.

In "Through the Looking Glass Darkly: Medievalism, Satanism, and the Dark Illumination of the Self in the Aesthetics of Black Metal," Brenda Walter faces the intricacy of black metal's inversions head on: "Often oversimplified as 'Christianity upside down,' the inverted aesthetics of Satanic black metal are actually quite complex, operating according to the specific rationality of medieval scholasticism and signifying deep discourses of power in Western culture." From its roots in Aristotelian cosmology, Walter traces Christian theology's construction of the Satanic as an "inverted hierarchy." Norwegian black metal distilled and appropriated the othering power of this construct. Allied to its rejection of Christianity was a "quest for mythical purity," a return to the land and its pagan associations. Walter follows the ways in which this path has itself become twisted and inverted as black metal has become a globalised aesthetic. She draws attention to the problematic persistence of Satanic motifs in black metal, especially beyond the ambit of the Christian West, asking whether this strategy does not in fact entrap its users into a binary structure not of their own devising. The potential for group conformity and replication of conservative norms is illustrated through some reactions to Gaahl's sexual orientation. The article poses an alternative: the blackened self, standing alone and autonomous, no longer defined by binary codes of good and evil. Even this proves impossible to sustain, as the self is absorbed into a new enslavement to "nature." Walter ends by suggesting that liberation is truly achieved when the blackened self "dissolves into the very darkness it attempted to convey," and finds liberation in unity with the void.

Reuben Dendinger's article, "The Way of the Sword: Christianity, Fascism, and the Folk Magic of Black Metal," focuses on the mythological image of the magic sword, which, in black metal, is the inverted cross. The sword is an expression of sovereign force, but also of identification with the key archetypes of black metal: "the feminine witch, the masculine warrior, and the androgynous goat Baphomet." Black metal's folk magic does not expand the sympathy of its practitioner, but turns her inward, awakening a gnosis which leads back to the buried nature religions despised by Christianity. Dendinger notes how this can become an occasion for black metal artists to embrace a variety of fascism, but argues that this occurs only when that "Black Metal falls short of a truly courageous *nigredo*, it emphasizes the pernicious and degenerative influence of outsiders rather than allowing Satan completely into the soul. For those fascists, they are still under the cross, even if it is an iron cross." Black metal's earth is romanticised, but also

depicted as bestial: It is not an alibi for blood and soil delusions. The article ends with a commentary on Mayhem's *Grand Declaration of War*, claiming that a true reversal of Christian enslavement of the earth comes not through fascism, but through spiritually awakening the beast within.

Bert Stabler begins "A Sterile Hole and a Mask Of Feces" by reflecting upon the Gnaw Their Tongues album title *An Epiphanic Vomiting of Blood*. Turning the practitioner inside out, vomiting is an uncanny reduplication of God's self-emptying in Hegel's version of Christianity. Stabler argues that black metal also charts a path toward rebirth, through the pain of becoming. But what is the nature of the salvation it seeks? Is black metal, by refusing to abject the abjected, seeking some kind of ultimate plenitude (a plenitude that would also be—full of shit)? Stabler suggests that this is not all there is to be said. He draws on Hegel, as interpreted by Žižek, to argue that what is expressed through the dialectic of positivity and negativity is not some latent or yet-to-be-realised harmony, but an empty and self-sundered absolute (signified by the complex but minimal difference of corpsepaint's white-on-white): "To wear one's cultural identity as a mask is not to borrow from a signifying field (the nation, the market, or the body) but to externalize an ontological position (the spirit, a shared history, or the drives)." Both sovereign and enslaved, the black metal subject has a subversive, queering power, for all the residual homophobia in sections of the metal community. Stabler associates the transformation of hell into a kind of bliss with the liberation of the individual from substantive ties. The earth becomes both paradise and wilderness. The complexity of black metal's inversion is underlined once more, as Stabler contests simplistic dreams of purity and the void which would repress the opening of the anal boundary and the release of the captive Other within: "The romance of a hermetically insular, organically unified totality is pierced by Black Metal's jagged, discontinuous soundscape."

In "Eccentricies and Disorientations: Experiencing geometricies in Black Metal," a visual art portfolio curated by Elodie Lesourd and Amelia Ishmael, works by six artists—Andrew McLeod, Dimitris Foutris, Stephen Wilson, Sandrine Pelletier, and Gast Bouschet and Nadine Hilbert—stretch black metal's significance beyond language. Structured around a phenomenological approach to geometry and black metal acoustics, this portfolio explores the architectural implications of inversion through describing how visual art suggests a perspective and orientation in space. Mcleod's black metal logophillic drawing conjures the sound of the music addressed in these pages. This is followed by Wilson's and Foutris' photographs, which require an inversion of one's head to grasp their transcendence. The geometric shapes build to Pelletier's sculptures, and Gast Bouschet and Nadine

Hilbert's photographs are reminiscent of a space between a charred stave church frame and an allusion to unexpected angular lines of early Neues Sehen Bauhaus photography. The vertigo brought about in this portfolio interjects us with the question of inversion's relationship to a ground.

As is evident from the preceding work, black metal theory is not bound by the music it is named after per se, and has spilled over into realms of art, literature, and beyond. Erik van Ooijen exemplifies the scope of black metal theory in its crashing through the genre barrier like a bolting horse in his study of animal inversion in the deathgrind work of Cattle Decapitation. In "Giving Life Harmoniously: Animal Inversion in Cattle Decapitaiton" the theme of animal inversion in Cattle Decapitation's lyrics and artwork is traced back to sixteenth-century images inverting hierarchical relationships including animals rising up against man—"*de os vilt den slachter*," the old Dutch translated as "the ox flays the butcher"—"[depicting] social upheaval in a comic mode" and "[acknowledging human] monstrosity . . . from the subaltern point of view," as van Ooijen puts it. These themes are not only superficially illustrative of an inversion, but, as van Ooijen argues, also challenge and invert violent themes, misogynies, and hierarchies within the grindcore and deathgrind genres. This extends to a queering of the genre that builds on a thoroughly unsympathetic inversion, which van Ooijen writes as not simply entailing "a dismantling of dichotomies resulting in a flat uniformity of non-friction," but by a thoroughly disruptive solution, an anti-anthropocentrism that sees the end of the human—"only the killing of man may end of human tyranny"—the destruction of a kind of life which allows new life to emerge. The aim, though a message communicated as art, is a political one that calls for a critical reflection on the disastrous direction that human dominance leads us. It is further an inversion of sound and meaning where the apparent extreme violence in the images and lyrics draws attention to real violence perpetrated on animals, ultimately bringing about a refusal of violence rather than a production of it.

Bergson's philosophy of memory is blackened by Louis Hartnoll's exploration of three features of memory in "Contempt, Atavism, Eschatology: Black Metal and Bergson's Porous Inversion." Here, Hartnoll lays down a substantial philosophical challenge in understanding black metal's history through the metaphysical inversion of virtual and actual memory and its object. This includes that which is presented in representational memory, a memory that is dead and pays no attention to life. Removing oneself, as Hartnoll puts it, "from corporeal demands and [immersing] oneself into the dead and disinterested past," referring to black metal's distinction between the staged and the unrestageable. This is a memory

that is unattainable and impossible, describing black metal's egesting of a "commitment to an unrealized and unrealizable history." Hartnoll first seeks to define and explain Bergson's view on memory in the context of black metal—the divisions of habit memory, memory images, representational memory, and pure memory. Pure memory, expressed by Bergson and reflected in Burzum's lyric in the song *Lost Wisdom*, retains its purity in being virtual and not depending on the actual for its subsistence. Black metal, through a Bergsonian reading, relates to the past by inverting and exchanging matter and memory. Black metal's phases and its history in memory, Hartnoll writes, can be understood through "divided but interlinked temporalities": a contempt for the present, the atavistic past, and finally an eschatological perspective on the future. These stages can be traced in the lyrics of Darkthrone and Mayhem, and through to third-wave projections.

These contributions are not of one voice, but they articulate a convergence: Inversion is not a negation, it is a contrary, to borrow William Blake's phrase.[12] In black metal's noise as a form of silence, the unintelligible as obscure *is* the means of communication. This volume is a contribution to the manufacturing of obscurity; after all, it was in obscurity that Moses received the tablets from YHWH: "The People remained at a distance while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was."[13] From darkness to light to darkness is a move from the womb to early development to maturity. Growth is growth towards darkness; life is an ascent into the night,[14] a move from meaningfulness and understanding to obscurity and insight, an elevation towards Satan. Black metal embraces the inverted obscure, indeed as Amelia Ishmael has claimed, black metal is a myth.[15] This collection of essays in the second volume of *Helvete* adds to the growing articulation of black metal theory's disruption and inversion of theory itself, extending the critical blackening of theory spiralling ever downwards, for which its deepest abyss is its highest form.

NOTES

[1] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Supplement to the Third Part, Question 94, Article 1: http://www.newadvent.org/summa/5094.htm.

[2] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Supplement to the Third Part, Question 94, Article 3.

[3] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 12–13.

[4] Emperor, "Inno a Satana," *In the Nightside Eclipse* (Candlelight, 1994).

[5] See Niall Scott, "Black Confessions and Absu-lution" in *Hideous Gnosis: Black Metal Theory Symposium 1*, ed. Nicola Masciandaro (CreateSpace Open Publishing, 2010), 221–231.

[6] Cf. Steven Shakespeare, "Into the Vomitorium: Diseased Sacraments" in *P.E.S.T.: Black Metal Theory Symposium* 3, ed. Michael O'Rourke (forthcoming, 2014) and Brice Ezell, "'Only Utter Darkness Can Be Likened to Light': A Comparative Analysis of Deathspell Omega's Metaphysical Satanism and the Cārvāka Darśana" *Zetalambmary*, March 2013: http://www.zetalambmary.com/only-utter-darkness-can-be-likened-to-light-a-comparative-analysis-of-deathspell-omegas-metaphysical-satanism-and-the-carvaka-darsana.

[7] Hunter Hunt Hendrix, "Transcendental Black Metal: A Vision of Apocalyptic Humanism" in *Hideous Gnosis*, ed. Nicola Masciandaro, 53–65: 58.

[8] See Steven Shakespeare, "Shuddering: Black Metal on the Edge of the Earth" in *Melancology*, ed. Scott Wilson, (London: Zero Books, forthcoming 2014) and "Of Plications: A Short Summa on the Nature of Cascadian Black Metal" in *Glossator: Practice and Theory of the Commentary* 6 (2012), 1–31.

[9] Nicola Masciandaro, "The Sorrow of Being" (extract), *The Whim*, 2013: http://thewhim.blogspot.co.uk/2013/12/from-sob-why.html. Accessed 14/2/14.

[10] Masciandaro, "The Sorrow of Being."

[11] Masciandaro, "The Sorrow of Being."

[12] Mary Lynn Johnson, "Milton and its Contexts" in *The Cambridge Companion to William Blake*, ed. Morris Eaves (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 240–241.

[13] The Holy Bible: The Book of Exodus, 2:21.

[14] Niall Scott, "A Black Mass: A Reading From the Void" (Black Mass at the Z, The Hague, Gallery exhibition pamphlet, 2011).

[15] Amelia Ishmael, "Black Thorns in the White Cube" (exhibition catalogue), 2012.

Through the Looking Glass Darkly
Medievalism, Satanism, and the Dark Illumination of the Self in the Aesthetics of Black Metal

Brenda S. Gardenour Walter

Entering into the magic circle of black metal, we cross an invisible threshold into a world of inversion, a dark dreamscape rendered in black, white, and blood.[1] Here, in the in the sempiternal night, ice-laden autumn winds twist through gnarled and blackened woodlands as shadows grow long beneath a freezing moon. Throughout the forest, covens of corpse-painted men robed in black leather chant demonic paeans to death and destruction, to pain and terror, in honor of their lord Satan. In an ecstasy of evil, they lift their heads to the dark sky, pink tongues lolling while phallic fingers writhe and clench into fists. Inverted crosses, downward-facing pentagrams, and the severed heads of sheep flicker in the firelight cast from the conflagration of Christian stave churches in the distance, while the Goat of Mendes, ruler of darkness, surveys his kingdom of hellfire and sulphurous smoke.

The upside-down world of Satanic black metal is uncanny, both familiar in its use of inverted tropes and schemes and yet completely "other" to those on the outside looking in, including Christians and consumers of mainstream popular culture.[2] For them, it is a spectacle of abject horror in which the viewer, unable to look away, becomes one with the object of revulsion through *jouissance*, or desire.[3] Those within the hellish magic circle experience a similar abjection as they gaze outward at the decadence, hypocrisy, and emptiness of WASP-y middle-class culture. In this context, the inverted signifiers of Satanic evil serve not only to distance the blackened self from the hated once-self / other, but also to caricature and reflect the horrors of human society. From Satanic black metal to Cascadian black metal and beyond, the black metal mirror moves from inverted binary into existential complexity, calling the viewer to contemplate not only humanity and

nature, but also his or her own fetid image. Staring into the darkened abyssal glass, the blackened self discovers negatives of negatives, a string of perpetual inversions that ripple into oblivion. At the moment of dark epiphany, the abyss gazes back, the self succumbs to blackness, and is annihilated.[4]

MEDIEVAL CONSTRUCTS: ARISTOTELIAN CONTRARIETY AND THE INVERTED EVIL OTHER

Often oversimplified as "Christianity upside down," the inverted aesthetics of Satanic black metal are actually quite complex, operating according to the specific rationality of medieval scholasticism and signifying deep discourses of power in Western culture. In the thirteenth century, scholars working in the milieu of the medieval university sought to reconcile Aristotelian constructs and epistemologies with those of Christianity, including the scriptures and the Neo-Platonic tradition transmitted through patristic authors such as Augustine.[5] In works such as *De Universo*, *Summa Theologica*, and *Scriptum Super Sententiis*, scholastic theologians William of Auvergne and Thomas Aquinas used Aristotle's logic and natural philosophy as supporting structures for theological precepts and articles of faith.[6] Aristotle's cosmology, elemental theory, and physics would prove particularly valuable in the construction of paradigmatic Christian goodness and its radically-inverted contrary, Satanic evil, two binary categories that, by the fifteenth century, were not only ossified but also deeply entrenched in Western culture.

At the heart of the medieval construction of good and evil lay Aristotle's cosmos, which was divided into two realms. The realm beyond the moon was imagined to be a series of nesting crystalline spheres, each of which contained a planet. The outermost sphere of the fixed stars served as the boundary between the cosmos and the Prime Mover, an entity who applied pressure to the spheres and set them into motion through love.[7] All movement in the superlunary realm was circular, perpetual, and perfect; below the moon, however, chaos reigned. The sublunary realm was composed of the four elements—fire, air, water, and earth. Because fire was the lightest and most pure element, it hovered above elemental air and rose toward the lunar sphere. Earth, on the other hand, was the most dense and corrupt of the elements, and therefore sank like dross to the very core of the cosmos.[8] The inherently unstable nature of the four elements meant that they were in perpetual states of transformation, thereby creating myriad forms of matter and a chaotic physical world of violent motion and change.[9]

In the thirteenth century, scholastic theologians began the process of reconciling this ancient and pagan cosmic system with Christianity, thereby transforming

the Prime Mover into the Christian God, the realm beyond the sidereal sphere into his Empyrean Heaven, the world below the moon into a demonic playground, and the bowels of the earth into Hell. The superlunary realm of divine goodness was imagined as a heavenly hierarchy, with God enthroned in the Empyrean, "the subtlest of all bodies" containing "within itself the purest light."[10] There, the Christian God was surrounded by seraphim, the Virgin Mary, and the saints of his royal court. Radiating from the Godhead, divine light suffused the weightless and translucent ethereal bodies that populated the heavens, illuminating the choirs of angels arranged in concentric circles that descended to the lunar boundary. These angelic beings, Aquinas argued, stood at guard, their eyes turned toward the brightest heaven, in perfect obedience to the Deity.[11] From God on his golden throne to the lowest angel, the heavenly realm was one of singularity and unity, a slavish collective bound to serve God's will alone. On earth as in heaven, only those willing to submit fully to the Christian God through his institutional Church would one day be permitted to see the wonders of this static and luminous world; all others would damned to the Hellish world below the moon for all eternity.

Having structured and codified the realm of divine goodness, theologians set about constructing the realm of Satanic evil. Following Aristotle's theory of radical contrariety, they ensured that earthly evil would be the absolute inversion of heavenly goodness in all of its qualities and parts.[12] Sublunary evil was envisioned as an inverted hierarchy, with Satan at its nadir enthroned in the icy core of the dark and fetid earth. Aquinas and his colleagues argued that fallen angels did not have natural bodies, but could collect moist and fetid "earthly exhalations," or noxious air, in order to manifest in physical forms.[13] Once coagulated from the "dark atmosphere" that was their home, Satan and his demons most often appeared as monstrous black angels with leathery wings and deformed features. Created as inverted beings, they spoke through their asses and shat through their mouths; associated with the lower bowels and the reproductive organs, they emitted a continual stench of sulphur and dead fish.[14] While demons had the power to "hover through the fog and filthy air," they remained trapped in the sublunary realm, bound to the corrupt earth—the cold and dry element associated with autumn, black bile melancholy, the colors black and grey, and death—from which they might never ascend.[15]

Wicked as they might be, Satan and his minions were initially limited in their power; they could not operate beyond natural law or physics, nor did they work together effectively towards a common goal. They had, after all, fallen from heaven because of their own willfulness, their refusal to submit to any power other than their own. Between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, however, demonic enti-

ties were increasingly ascribed greater power over their human prey. Aquinas, for example, argued that while demons were bound by natural law, they had roamed the earth for millennia and, having retained their angelic intelligence despite their fall from grace, grown more perceptive and learned many tricks with which to fool the feeble minds of women and men.[16] Events over the course of the fourteenth century, including the Great Famine, the Black Death, the Babylonian Captivity of the Church, and the Great Schism, as well the multiplication of heretics such as Jan Hus and his followers, led many theologians to believe that the Church was under assault by Satanic forces empowered by God to punish his wretched and disobedient children. While the early fifteenth-century cleric Johannes Nider saw this demonic assault as a call to reform the Church in its head and members, many others, such as the author of the *Errores Gazariorum* and Heinrich Kramer, imagined that Satan and his demons had organized themselves into a disciplined and hierarchical army whose primary objective was the destruction of the Christian Body.[17] Like the angels that had subsumed their own will to that of the Deity, so too had demons, apparently, become enslaved in obedience to their Lord Satan.

According to these latter sources, Satan's army was joined in its efforts to destroy orderly and obedient Christendom by devout human followers, including heretics, witches, Jews, and Muslims, all of whom were non-Christian and therefore cast into league with the Devil—the only other option in a radical binary system.[18] Like the demons whose will they obeyed, these Satanic "others" were ascribed inverted bodies, dominated by elemental earth and its correlating humor, black bile. According to medieval medical theory, those suffering from an excess of black bile were subject to fits of burning rage; this overheating produced "a dried, concentrated, opaque, black body" that, through the dispersion of heat, became increasingly cold, yielding a heavy and ashen clot forever bound to the earth.[19] This fundamentally cold physiology drove the melancholiac to crave the consumption of human blood, preferably that of Christian children, and to commit "perverse" sexual acts.[20] Wicked individuals no longer acted alone and according to their own will; instead, all evil was bound together into an inverted hierarchy constructed according to Aristotelian precepts as the absolute inversion of Christian perfection. In this upside-down Satanic world, every element of Christianity was mocked and reversed, a process evident in sources from the *Errores Gazariorum* (1430) and the *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486) to the full elaboration of the Witches' Sabbath as Black Mass in Nicholas Remy's *Demonolatry* (1595), Francesco Maria Guazzo's *Compendium Maleficarum* (1608) and Pierre de Lancre's *On the Inconstancy of Witches* (1612).[21] Witchcraft treatises such as these—which enjoyed a wide readership— reinforced deeply held beliefs that evil was inherently Satanic, involved inversions

of Christian worship by melancholic "others" who did not conform to socially accepted constructs of goodness, and entailed the submission of one's will to the Devil Himself, often through the signing of a formal pact.[22]

MODERN MEANINGS: FROM SATANIC ENSLAVEMENT TO SELF-POSSESSION TO ANNIHILATION IN BLACK METAL ECSTASY

Under the quills of medieval clerics, the inverted signifiers of Satanic otherness became a deep discourse of power backed by the unquestionable authority of characters such as Augustine, Aquinas, and Aristotle. After all, Christian scholars had set the agenda, constructed the binary system, and codified evil against their own narrow and slavish conception of goodness. Despite the novel epistemologies and modes of discourse that have fueled successive paradigm shifts from the late medieval to the postmodern world(s), the scholastic construction of Satanic evil and the specific rationality upon which it operates and to which it is perpetually bound remain virtually unchanged. From J. K. Huysmans' *Là-Bas* and the Grand Guignol works of André De Lorde to the delicious schlock of the modern supernatural horror film and paranormal "reality" television, the colors black, white, and red, the seasons of autumn and winter, the witching hours of midnight and three o'clock in the morning, icy drafts, inverted crosses, black candles, and goat heads continue to function as inverted and melancholic signifiers of Satanic evil—although few viewers know how or why.[23] In the ethos of black metal, Satanic signifiers have come to serve as powerful weapons with the ability to provoke sublime terror in uninitiated outsiders who often respond to them in a near-reptilian fashion, in slavish obedience to deep discourses that they do not comprehend. This deeply-coded and inverted aesthetic not only commands power over a captive and sheep-like audience, but also codes the black metal self as the abject, empowered, and evil "other."[24]

In late twentieth-century Norway, the crucible in which Satanic black metal was distilled and rarified, inversion would serve as a means of "othering" and a darkened path to self-empowerment.[25] Unmoved and unmoving, Norway has long had an exceptionally stable economy and a static bourgeois culture; it is likewise a bastion of Lutheran conservatism, a world in which everyone is expected to adhere to Christian mores, or at least appear to. In response to what they saw as the emptiness and hypocrisy of Norwegian culture, young bands such as the now-iconic *Mayhem* adopted the Satanic aesthetic as a core element of their identity.[26] In donning black leather, black t-shirts, and corpse paint, using inverted crosses, pentagrams, and blackened churches in their iconography, and incorporating self-

mutilation and necrotic animal parts into their live performances, *Mayhem* appropriated the medieval construction of inverted evil as a weapon against the heinous Christian once-self and now "other." The use of the Satanic by Norwegian black metal groups such as *Mayhem*, *Darkthrone*, *Immortal*, *Emperor*, *Burzum*, and *Gorgoroth* was particularly effective in eliciting outrageous responses from the conservative community both in Norway and throughout the Christian West. Emerging at the height of the Satanic Panic, a period in which the middle class saw itself embattled with evil forces in a dying world, the inverted iconography of black metal and the anti-Christian activities of many of its members were the culmination of bourgeois Christianity's worst nightmares—a rebellious youth enslaved by Satan and at war with God.[27]

For those who were called by the darkness, whether they gathered at Øystein Aarseth's *Helvete* record store, exchanged underground tapes through the mail, or attended performances, black metal served not merely a means of reactionary rebellion, but perhaps more importantly as a Satanic path to purification. The Satanic aesthetic, for example, delineated Norwegian black metal from other forms of Metal, such as Death Metal, which were not seen as extreme or "pure" enough. This quest for mythical purity runs like a blackened thread through the inverted world of northern black metal, most often taking the form of a return to an ancient pagan landscape dominated by darkness, cold, wind, and rocky earth.[28] In the Metal imagination—which is informed by modern masculinities and Romanticism as much as medievalism and the Satanic—a return to the primal past entails the return of the Norse gods, such as Wōden, and a warrior culture founded on individual ingenuity, prowess, and brute force.[29] Through the black metal looking glass, the "true" and "pure" Norway is constructed as a realm of sublunary melancholia, replete with vengeful and anti-Christian pagan gods and warriors who, wearing leather and brandishing swords and axes, appear against empty autumnal and winter landscapes, ensconced in fetid fog beneath a full moon. These primeval images are conflated with the earth-bound and inverted structures of Satanism, including desecrated cemeteries, burning churches, upside-down crosses, the celebration of the Black Mass (at Kraków and otherwise), and the invocation of the Devil Himself. This inverted Norway is a frigid land laden with the pure power of dark destruction, the throne of earth-bound evil.[30] In conflating the pagan past, melancholic elements, and Satanic inversion, the black metal aesthetic is consistent with medieval scholastic constructs, according to which pagan Norway was the land of wicked gods, trolls and witchcraft—all of which were cast into the category of un-Christian evil—as well as the source of *Septentrio*, the cold and dry

winds that swept down from the northern wastes, bringing winter's death to the fields and forests of the bountiful south.

This medievalism and the inverted aesthetics of Satanic black metal have spread like evil seeds from the northern pagan vastlands and the United Kingdom to Greece, Romania, the United States, Mexico, and Japan. In the process, black metal has become a transnational culture with a shared set of codes and signifiers that identify its producers and consumers as members of an inner circle, a Satanic elite within a larger metal community. While the black metal aesthetic is salient across cultures and conforms to the medieval scholastic construction of evil, it is legion in its meanings and interpretations across multiple contexts. Many within the black metal magic circle claim that they have found the path to liberation and self-empowerment. The darkened mirror of black metal, however, contains myriad inversions upon inversions, each reflection revealing the hopeless enslavement of the blackened self until its ultimate consummation with dark oblivion.

In the mirror's first layer, Satanic black metal appears to be a path to freedom from social constructs, a liberation from conservative ideals. In donning the externals of black metal, an individual is defining him or herself as separate from mainstream culture, as a purportedly empowered evil "other." Like a living mirror, the black metal self manifests the repulsiveness of Christian and mainstream society, mocks its fetid hypocrisy, and reflects it back outward, laughing as if to say, "This is what you are." Problematically, this reactionary abjection and inversion bind black metal to its hated other through *jouissance*, a form of desire. Furthermore, taking on the inverted identity of that which one hates only serves to validate the hated other. This is one of the primary complications of using Satanism as a means of countering Christianity. Satanism and its inverted signifiers are above all Christian constructs codified by theologians in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries using the authority of Scripture, the Church Fathers, and Aristotle. To adhere mindlessly to the Satanic metal aesthetic is to become trapped in a binary system in which two inverted categories perpetually spin around a single shared axis of meaning.[31]

This enslavement to distant discourses of power is even more fraught when Satanic black metal moves beyond the Euro-Christian West and into non-Christian and post-colonial contexts.[32] As an inversion of Christian goodness, the black metal aesthetic makes sense as a means to counter the dominant culture in a Christian society; but what do upside-down crosses, the color black, and pentagrams signify in Japan? The Japanese band Sigh incorporates both Satanic signifiers and Buddhist imagery into their aesthetic, suggesting an augmented binary inversion. In an act of double-coding, the inverted Satanic signifiers represent the rejection of the

Western Christian other that occupied Japan after World War II as well as the Japanese experience of their own willful submission to that other as wholly repulsive and abject; the Buddhist images, on the other hand, represent a reclaiming of a pre-Christian and mythically pure Japanese identity, one that is in a continual process of self-annihilation.[33] A similar case can be made for the Mexican black metal group Funereal Moon, whose discography reads like a late-medieval treatise on melancholic demons. Their lead singer, Darvula, wears a black monastic robe and corpse paint which features inverted crosses over both of his eyes and an inverted pentagram on his forehead. These signifiers, in particular the marking of Darvula's body, speak not only to rebellion against the dominant and conservative Catholic culture of modern Mexico, but also the Western, white, colonial, slave-holding "other" that Catholicism represents. In both Japan and Mexico, the black metal aesthetic serves as a means of expressing abjection toward and reclamation of the subjected body from the Christian and colonial invader.[34] While this appears to be a path towards liberation and personal empowerment, it is nevertheless a trap that binds the post-colonial self to the European other through a medieval Christian discourse of power. After all, no matter how evil Satan gets, He still plays by—and validates—Christianity's rules.

In keeping with the medieval construction of inverted and hierarchical evil, the black metal aesthetic often represents a state of enslavement, not only to old paradigms and to Satan Himself, but also to the tyranny of the purportedly-Satanic collective.[35] Bound together into a group of un-Christian un-believers, those who participate in black metal culture at this first and binary reflective level form an inverted organization that is as conservative in its behaviors and beliefs as orthodox Christianity. For example, much of the rhetoric of black metal culture focuses on what constitutes "true" black metal; one t-shirt has Mayhem's album cover for *De Mysteriis Dom Sathanas* on the back with a superimposed inverted pentagram and a roundel stating "Orthodox Black Metal Fundametalist." Funny? Yes, but not that far from the truth. Message boards and YouTube comment strands are replete with discussions of which bands are "real" black metal and which are "posers"; true black metal is often traced back to the Norwegian scene in the 1990s and therefore tied to white hegemonic constructs.

Not only bands but behaviors are governed by this slavish collective. Returning to the message boards, conservative strains within the ethos of Satanic black metal are not only anti-Christian—comment after comment demands that real black metal-heads must deny Christianity, worship the Devil, and participate in other stereotypically "evil" activities straight out of the *Malleus Maleficarum*—but also predominantly anti-gay. Rumors periodically surface about Gylve "Fenriz" Nagell

of Darkthrone being gay, perhaps because of his love of Icelandic electronica, which is, according to the collective, decidedly NOT black metal.[36] More recently, Gaahl, the lead singer of Gorgoroth, one of the most notorious black metal Norwegian bands, revealed that he was in a relationship with a male fashion designer. Up until this juncture, Gaahl had been elevated by some as the paragon of black metal masculinity and a paradigm for Satanic evil. Within the conservative black metal community, responses to Gaahl's homosexuality have been predominantly negative, ranging from comments claiming that gay men can't be a part of black metal to those claiming that homosexuals are an abomination that should be cleansed from the earth.[37] In fact, much of the black metal rhetoric surrounding Gaahl's sexual orientation has been indistinguishable from that of conservative and fundamentalist Christianity. One commenter called out several Gaahl-bashers, arguing that if they were truly black metal and truly Satanic, shouldn't they do and believe everything that Christians do not—shouldn't they actually be extremely liberal, to the point of anarchy?[38] Surrounded by mindless sheep enslaved by distant discourses and the tyranny of the collective, the lone voice in the internet wilderness went unanswered.

Behind this binary and superficial reflection in the black metal mirror lies a complex and more distant image: that of the single blackened self, standing alone in a barren waste, much like a gnarled and blackened tree against a northern winter sky. Here, Satanic inversions signify a return to the true Lucifer, the rebellious Angel of Light who refused to submit himself to God's will and to become enslaved by the divine. Cast down from heaven to the world below the moon, Lucifer crashed into the melancholic earth, dwelling within its icy core and wandering through its barren wastes.[39] Free from enslavement, his will bent to no one, Satan was left to contemplate his own existence, to act as his own god. Similarly, the aesthetics of black metal serve as a means of marking the Satanic self as an independent entity, a being separate from divine will and Christian constructs. In this deeper layer of the mirror, the individual is unbound, liberated from the prison-like strictures of good and evil, potentially free to live life according to the dictates of his or her own inner Satan.

Such liberation requires a reordering of morality centered on the self and the concomitant rejection of social codes and values; at an extreme, it demands that the blackened self eschew human society altogether and live in complete solitude like a disdainful Nietzschean hawk awaiting a chance to feed upon tender lambs' flesh.[40] In this we might think once again of Gaahl, purportedly living in his ancient house perched on the deeply-forested slope of a northern fjord.[41] From his melancholic aerie, Gaahl gave an interview to VICE in which he described his soli-

tary existence and his primal disgust for human society, including the fanboys of black metal who follow like a mindless flock of sheep, who erect for themselves false gods that they worship and obey.[42] Like Nietzsche, Gaahl argues that the tyranny of the collective—be it Christianity, black metal, socialism, or what have you—must be destroyed. "This is what the fall of the false gods will do; basically, you will be allowed to focus on the god within yourself. Of course, that's the only true god." The complete rejection of the collective, however, proves nearly impossible. Gaahl goes on to say that the god in the self is connected to the "god in all things; God is within nature, and nature will always grow. That is the force of all life, is to grow." The primal return to a deified natural world resounds throughout the work of Cascadian black metal bands such as Wolves in the Throne Room, who see the eco-destructive hive mind of modern civilization as a sorrowful vastness of "lifeless chaos," a world laid bare by "black religion."[43] Both Gaahl's Satanism and Cascadian black metal are problematic in their attempts to reject the collective in favor of an anchoritic life in the wilderness. Once liberated from human society, the blackened self must somehow return to a harmonious, eternal, and "human" nature—a physical place and ontological state from which the modern individual has alienated him or herself entirely—where it will be once again enslaved by the laws of nature and endless cycles of growth, death, decay, and regeneration.[44]

Staring deep into the darkened looking glass, far beyond distant discourses of medieval inversion, beyond the false hope of a return to a mythic and primal past, beyond the empty promise of a truly liberated and sentient existence, the blackened self sees its inverted reflection reverberating into a formless void, a vanishing point.[45] In this Lovecraftian space of maddening non-being, of "cosmic outsideness," the discursive regimes of Medievalism, Christianity, and Satanism cease to exist. Like all of its gods and devils, human society disappears into the darkness, along with the need to define oneself against it. The black metal aesthetic loses all power to signify and dissolves into the very darkness it attempted to convey. In the place of humanness, of nature, of growth, of time . . . there is nothing. Here, in the moment of dark illumination, the viewer encounters the final inversion—non-human non-existence—and at last achieves true liberation through destruction. At the still point, in a moment of ecstatic union with the darkness, the self is annihilated in blackness and absorbed into the Oneness of Nothing, unfettered at last.

NOTES

[1] On the magic circle as a realm of play and transcendence, see Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1955). On otherness and othering, see the works of Michel Foucault, in particular *A History of Sexuality, Volume I* (New York: Vintage, 1990).

[2] For the use of Freudian and Lacanian uncanny in horror, see Barbara Creed, *Phallic Panic* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing, 2005).

[3] On abjection, see Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

[4] "And when you gaze long into an abyss, the abyss also gazes into you." Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Helen Zimmern (Amazon Digital, 2011), Aphorism 146.

[5] The works of Aristotle had arrived at the medieval university with myriad medical, legal, and philosophical texts as a result of the twelfth-century translation movement, during which Latin scholars traveled to areas of the Iberian peninsula purportedly "reclaimed" from Islam, translated the Arabic texts housed in the Madrassas there, and returned with them to Europe. For more on the Arabic inheritance, see Dmitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arab Culture: The Greco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early Abbasid Society* (London: Routledge, 1998).

[6] Edward Grant, *The Nature of Natural Philosophy* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2010), 6: "...almost all theologians can be said to have acquired extensive knowledge of natural philosophy. Many undoubtedly regarded it as worthy of study in itself and not merely because of its traditional role as the handmaiden of theology." See also William of Auvergne, *The Universe of Creatures*, trans. Roland J. Teske (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1998).

[7] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 6:7, states that the Prime Mover set the cosmos in motion out of love. See also Aristotle, *Physics*, 8. For a full elaboration of the Aristotelian cosmos in the medieval world, see Edward Grant, *Planets, Stars, and Orbs: The Medieval Cosmos, 1200–1687* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[8] "These four bodies are fire, air, water, earth. Fire occupies the highest place among them all, earth the lowest, and two elements correspond to these in their relation to one another, air being nearest to fire, water to earth. The whole world surrounding the earth, then, the affections of which are our subject, is made up of these bodies." Aristotle, *Meteorology*, 1:2. "So at the center and round it we get earth and water, the heaviest and coldest elements, by themselves; round them and contiguous with them, air and what we commonly call fire." Aristotle, *Meteorology*, 1:3.

[9] Aristotle, *Physics*, passim.

[10] Aquinas insisted that it was composed of the purest ether, or rarified fire, hot and dry. Edward Grant, *Planets, Stars, and Orbs: The Medieval Cosmos 1200–1687* (Cambridge: Cam-

bridge University Press, 1996), 373. See also Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang, *Heaven: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

[11] Aquinas, "Treatise on the Angels," in the *Summa Theologica* (questions 50–64). Cf. Thomas Cantimpré, "Life of Christina the Astonishing," in *Thomas Cantimpre: The Collected Saints' Lives*, ed. Margot King and Barbara Newman, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 131: "And see how quick the Angels were to obey the bidding of the Lord!"

[12] On Aristotle and radical inversion, see Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) and "Inversion, Misrule, and the Meaning of Witchcraft," *Past and Present* 87 (1980), 98–127.

[13] Thomas Aquinas, "De Distinctione Angelicorum Spirituum," *De Substantiis Separatis*, trans. Francis J. Lescoe (1959). From the *Summa Theologica*, Part One, Article 64: "Consequently a twofold place of punishment is due to the demons: one, by reason of their sin, and this is hell; and another, in order that they may tempt men, and thus the darksome atmosphere is their due place of punishment." This correlates with Aristotle's theory of atmospheric clouds as the "exhalations" of the earth, cold and moist. See Aristotle, *Meteorology*, 1:3.

[14] See R. B. Pynsent, "The Devil's Stench and Living Water: A Study of Demons and Adultery in Czech Vernacular Literature of the Middle Ages and Renaissance," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 71 (1993): *The Slavonic and East European Review* 71 (1993), 601–30. See also Martha Bayless, *Sin and Filth in Medieval Culture: The Devil in the Latrine* (London: Routledge, 2011).

[15] "All fair is foul, and foul is fair, hover through the fog and the filthy air." Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 1.1, 11–12. For a discussion of black, melancholia, and evil, see François Azouvi, "The Plague, Melancholy, and the Devil," *Diogenes* 27 (1979), 112–30.

[16] Aquinas, *On the Sentences*, Part Two, d. 7, q. 2, a. 1. On the particular vulnerability of women to demons, see Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

[17] On Nider, the Council of Basel, his agenda for reform, and the *Formicarius*, see Michael D. Bailey, *Battling Demons: Witchcraft, Heresy, and Reform in the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State Press, 2002), as well as Michael D. Bailey and Edward Peters, "A Sabbat of Demonologists: Basel 1430–1441," *The Historian* 65 (2003), 1375–1395. On the Malleus Maleficarum, see Hans Peter Broedel, *The Malleus Maleficarum and the Construction of Witchcraft* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).

[18] For an alternative perspective on alterity versus binary and the construction of categories, see Eugene Thacker, "Three Questions on Demonology," *Hideous Gnosis: Black Metal Theory Symposium 1*, ed. Nicola Masciandaro (CreateSpace, 2010), 179–220.

[19] Azouvi, "The Plague, Melancholy, and the Devil," 114. See also Ireven M. Resnick, *Marks of Distinction: Christian Perceptions of Jews in the High Middle Ages* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2012).

[20] This conformed not only to medieval medical theory, in which the humorally imbalanced body craved substances with qualities contrary to those it contained in excess in order to rebalance itself, but also to ancient rhetorical constructs of otherness—including accusations of sexual perversion and cannibalism—such as that recorded in the works of Mincius Felix. See David Frankfurter, *Evil Incarnate* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

[21] For other early descriptions of the inverted Witches' Sabbath, see Jacquier's *De calcatione daemonum* (1452) and the *Flagellum haereticorum fascinariorum* (1458).

[22] For the medieval roots of the pact, see Alain Boureau, *Satan the Heretic: The Birth of Demonology in the Medieval West* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2006).

[23] On the ways in which these signifiers work within the specific rationality of the paranormal, see Brenda Gardenour Walter, "Phantasmic Science: Medieval Theology, Victorian Spiritualism, and the Specific Rationality of Twenty-First Century Ghost Hunting," *Jefferson Journal of Science and Culture* 3 (2013).

[24] The appropriation of evil to define and empower the self is not new, having been adopted by Renaissance *magi*, early modern Hellfire Clubs, and the modern quasi-Satanist, Anton LaVey. LaVey's use of over-the-top inverted Satanic aesthetics, for example, served as a means of mocking mainstream, pseudo-Christian middle class America, as well as their children, the purportedly peace-loving hippies—the very world from which LaVey himself came. See *Satanis: The Devil's Mass*, a 1970 documentary by Anton LaVey himself, as well as Blanche Barton's *The Secret Life of a Satanist: The Authorized Biography of Anton LaVey* (Los Angeles: Feral House Press, 1992).

[25] This is not meant to disrespect earlier, non-Norwegian black metal bands such as *Venom*. The Norwegian scene, with its violence and church burnings, brought the aesthetic to a global audience, and therefore serves as my starting point.

[26] For general background, see Michael Moynihan's tabloid-esque *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground* (Los Angeles: Feral House, 2003).

[27] On the Satanic Panic, see Bill Ellis, *Raising the Devil: Satanism, New Religions, and the Media* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2000) and *Lucifer Ascending: The Occult in Folk and Popular Culture* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2003). For hilarity's sake, see Geraldo Rivera's 1988 NBC primetime special, "Devil Worship: Exposing Satan's Underground," as well as Carl A. Raschke, *Painted Black: From Drug Killings to Heavy Metal, the Alarming True Story of How Satanism is Terrorizing Our Communities* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1990).

[28] The association of paganism with the Satanic is beyond troublesome; one is pre-Christian, the other is the product of Christianity, and both were collapsed into the same category of "non-Christian non-goodness" by medieval clerics.

[29] This is, of course, a past forged by the Romantics, not an actual representation of early-medieval pagan life. Romantic strains can be seen in Bjorn's comment from Mats

Lundberg's 2008 documentary, *Black Metal Satanica*: The Norse gods "were far more personal. To put it into Black Metal, it had something to do with the nature, your blood." (One can't help seeing *Blut und Boden* in this sort of discourse, but the role of Romanticism in nationalism and fascism are beyond the boundaries of this discussion.)

[30] See Brenda Gardenour Walter, "Corrupt Air, Poisonous Places, and the Toxic Breath of Witches in Late-Medieval Medicine and Theology" in *Toxic Airs: Body, Place, Planet in Historical Perspective*, eds. James Rodger Fleming and Ann Johnson (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014).

[31] Even if, as Derrida would argue, that meaning is of necessity decentered. See Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1978), 357–70.

[32] For an overview of transnational Metal, see *Black Metal: Beyond the Darkness* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2012).

[33] On double coding, see Charles Jencks, *What is Post-Modernism?* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987). In the case of Japan, an interesting pattern emerges. As the hated colonial past returns, the subjected culture attempts to return to a distant and mythologized past before the colonization. The effect is that of a perpetually-spinning vortex leading back into oblivion in order to escape existence in the present.

[34] On Mexico and the legacy of the encomienda system, see Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States 1492–Present* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005); on Japanese subjection of the body, brothels, and self-hatred, see John Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: Norton & Company, 1999).

[35] In Mats Lundberg's documentary *Black Metal Satanica* (Cleopatra: 2008) Ondskapt says "We don't have a book, you understand. We do have a very strong foundation, which is inverted Christianity . . . one basically has to believe very strongly that it is right to kill, it is right to steal, it is right to do all of these wicked deeds. And when you realize that you do these things for a higher power . . . when you are a slave to this higher power . . . you are seeing a devil worshipper."

[36] This discourse has increased since the cultic popularity of Aaron Aites and Audrey Ewell's documentary, *Until the Light Takes Us* (Variance Films: 2009).

[37] From a YouTube comment thread: "What gets me so winded up is Gaahl's blatant hypocrisy. here he is "Mr. Evil" in his fuckin' cellar/dungeon trying his best to look as evil as possible hailing Satan as his inspiration to everything - very black metal I must say - And then him and his bum-chum decide to bring out a ladies clothing range and silly bright frocks. Oh and apparently the name of the range means "Happiness" in some old Norwegian dialect or whatever who cares. Cut the shit man . . . Gaahl is just a nancy-boy trying to be all fuckin' brutal and once again just proves that his so-called "metal is a way of life" bullshit really is just another front to look all superior - when in the end he's just the bitch of some kid boyfriend. U can't be brutal and a nancy-boy at the same time, to say you can

is a very hard argument to make . . ." From http://www.metalstorm.net/events/news_comments.php?news_id=7573&page=2&message_id.

[38] "Since when is being a Satanist supposed to be the "epitome of masculinity"? Gaahl is VERY anti-Christian; what's more anti-Christian than being gay? And also, what makes yo think that all Gays are "little Sissies"? Try telling that to Gaahl after he overpowered a straight guy enough to tie him to a chair and torture him for six hours. Or tell the bears, or the Ancient Romans or Greeks, who fucked AND kicked ass all over Europe for decades." From http://www.metalstorm.net/events/news_comments.php?news_id=7573&page=2&message_id.

[39] British Library, MS Egerton 2781, *Book of Hours*, 14th Century.

[40] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Helen Zimmern (Amazon Digital, 2011).

[41] "True Norwegian Black Metal," prods. Peter Beste, Rob Semmer, Iver Berglin, and Mike Washlesky (Vice Broadcasting Systems, 2007). Gaahl in reality lived in a flat in Bergen where he had an active social life; his solitary boyhood home, however, is an integral part of his aesthetic construction.

[42] "I have no interest in getting a flock of sheep . . . then I would be just as bad as society is . . . There are so many of these sheep characters . . ."

[43] Wolves in the Throne Room, "Behold the Vastness and Sorrow," *Two Hunters* (Southern Lord, 2007).

[44] On our separation from nature, see Steven Shakespeare, "The Light that Illuminates Itself, the Dark that Soils Itself: Blackened Notes from Schelling's Underground," in Masciandaro, ed., *Hideous Gnosis: Black Metal Theory Symposium 1*.

[45] One might think here of Schopenhauer's belief that each level of aesthetics gives way until one ultimately sees the true condition of human life, which is suffering, and will be repulsed.

THE WAY OF THE SWORD
Christianity, Fascism, and the Folk Magic of Black metal

Reuben Dendinger

We have discovered our way
  —Mayhem

In the article "'*Remain True to the Earth!*': Remarks on the Politics of Black Metal," Benjamin Noys criticizes what he refers to as the "embarrassing archaic fascist nostalgia"[1] in some black metal. It is true that the basic symbolism of black metal is suggestive of a spiritual process, sometimes represented as lycanthropy, which takes as its point of departure a rejection of modern society and a yearning for an ancient mythological past. In some instances this romantic mythology manifests as fascism, but a closer look at the "folk magic" of black metal reveals that the psychology of fascism represents a black metal that is incomplete, that mistakes the true meaning of this "archaic" symbolism.

By "folk magic" I mean the spiritual content of black metal as it has developed organically, one might say unconsciously, in the art form. I certainly do not mean to present it as the universal "monomyth" of black metal, but merely as one way of understanding the themes and images involved. Central to the interpretation that follows is one image in particular: the inverted cross. We shall see that the inversion of the cross is in fact its transformation into the sword, and that this initial inversion is the requisite for black metal's folk magic. Particular attention will be paid to Mayhem's *Grand Declaration of War* as a case study in this symbolism. But the symbolic properties of black metal are best understood in the context of a symbolic history, the mythopoesis of which comprises the first section of this article.

In the 1970s, the earliest practitioners of Metal refined their substance from the raw rock that was their inheritance. Soon, they had discovered steel, and built lots

of motorcycles out of it. The '80s came, and the Metal-workers knew it was time to go underground, to search for natural forges in the subterranean rivers of fire, to look for rare and precious stones, for hidden things, for danger. But also to hide themselves from the eyes of God, as, it was becoming increasingly apparent, their work was witchcraft, and forbidden.

Here, beneath the earth, the first great blades were forged, and the young practitioners who wielded these blades became legends, for it was they, in their adventures through the depths of the Earth, who discovered the fires of Hell where languished the ghosts of witches and pagan heroes, and the exiled pagan gods. And these spirits initiated the practitioners into the many mysteries of Hell and Satan, teaching them the secret history, and the old ways of the ancestors. In this way, the ghosts of witches and pagan heroes and the exiled pagan gods were freed from their imprisonment in Hell by those first warriors who opened the way. From contact with these ancient spirits, and also the punk movement, the Metal movement flourished and evolved in many directions, one of these being black metal.

There are three sacred images that are essential to black metal and to the telling of this story: the feminine witch, the masculine warrior, and the androgynous goat Baphomet. The witch represents pagan spirituality and contact with the unconscious, doubly forbidden by long centuries of Christian repression and modern capitalist materialism. Baphomet represents the fertility and liberation of wildness. The warrior, or barbarian, is the forbidden spirit of war, what Scott Wilson calls a "figure for the sovereign force of Black Metal."[2] These are the central profaned and repressed images recovered from Hell by the earliest practitioners, and the process of their assimilation is the creation of the magic sword of black metal. As Venom sings, "Don't burn the witch / The ways of Hell aren't wrong."[3] With the reception of the magic sword, the practitioner begins his adventure as a bard of the darkness, a conduit for the aesthetic-spiritual energy that manifests in what is known as black metal.

The Christianity despised by black metal—the Christianity that, in the mythic history of pagan consciousness, conquered Europe and endeavored to destroy traditional earth-based culture and religion—relies on the repression of these images, through "witch hunts" and "scapegoating," rituals that sanitize imperial power and society by projecting evil and guilt onto a foreign other. The cross came to symbolize this relationship towards evil—Christ died to cleanse the sins of his followers. To become a Christian, one must accept this blood sacrifice and cast one's personal demons down into Hell and out onto the other. As for the "witch" within society, so for the "barbarian" enemy on the map.

Of course, these are not new ideas. What is important are the associations that these processes have with traditional black metal images—the witch, the barbarian, and the goat—because the magic sword described earlier, the sword wielded by the black metal practitioner, is the inverted cross, and the inversion of witch hunt psychology. The black metal practitioner accepts and embodies all that is rejected and repressed, holding high and proudly this magic sword of evil as the all-against-one of the witch hunt becomes the one-against-all of the solitary slayer or the sorcerer in his tower.

In contrast to Christianity's universalizing mission and the place of the cross as the world-center, the magic sword, the ancestral masculinity of the practitioner, is radically localizing. The sword guides the practitioner into the night and underground, to uncover the buried wisdom of the earth.

In "'*Remain True to the Earth!*': Remarks on the Politics of Black Metal," Benjamin Noys uses the philosophy of Sale Famine, of the band Peste Noire, as a starting point to discuss fascism in the genre. He writes:

> In Famine's cultural racism Black Metal is the reflection or expression of a national or territorial essence, a buried or obliterated 'essence' that must be recovered or re-articulated. At the same time this essence is always articulated with a Satanic theo-politics that blackens and corrodes what obscures this essence.[4]

Expressed thus, Famine's theory of black metal is akin to the processes described in this essay, though we will see shortly how the two models diverge. And it is not only that Satanism "blackens and corrodes what obscures [the] essence," but also that the essence is often contaminated with Satanism, and vice versa, as a result of the prolonged exile in Hell of the pagan gods who are this energy's manifestation. This aesthetic-spiritual essence of the land is analogous to the buried instinct of the individual consciousness, and in black metal the search for either is bound up with the other.

Noys goes on to analyze Famine's extreme right political philosophy in depth, describing it as a "peculiar, to say the least, nationalism, although one not quite so strange when one notes the occult strains running through Nazism, fascism, and extreme right cultures."[5]

I have no doubt Joseph Campbell would include fascist occultism as among what he describes as "Totem, tribal, racial, and aggressively missionizing cults" that

represent only partial solutions of the psychological problem of subduing hate by love; they only partially initiate. Ego is not annihilated in them; rather, it is enlarged; instead of thinking only of himself, the individual becomes dedicated to the whole of his society. The rest of the world meanwhile is left outside the sphere of his sympathy.[6]

Mainstream Christianity, as Campbell acknowledges, is also within this category. No path will lead anywhere (except perhaps into servitude) without first achieving nigredo and overcoming scapegoat psychology.

And of course, while expanding one's "sphere of sympathy" has been the traditional goal of many spiritual systems, it is obviously not the aim of black metal's folk magic. Instead of expanding consciousness upwards and outwards to envelope everything in the Christian magic of love, the ancestral blade of black metal guides the practitioner inwards and downwards. "Clearly," as Jung puts it, "the left-hand path does not lead upwards to the kingdom of the gods and eternal ideas, but down into natural history, into the bestial instinctive foundations of human existence."[7] The inverted cross, or upward sword, is rebellion, uprising, activity, manifestation of unconscious force; it is the subterranean, internal elements, fire and water, son and daughter; it is adventure, primal and ecstatic. The aesthetic-spiritual energy of the land is eternal, and so it is not a past era we are nostalgic for, it is simply the connection to this energy, the connection that has been systematically eradicated by Christianity.

What of "right-hand" metal, exemplified by Bathory's *Twilight of the Gods*, invoking the external, the righteous, sky-father and earth-mother? This type of metal is only possible after the initial discovery of the magic sword; the greater functions of Christianity (God and the Holy Mother) have been removed (or revealed as already dead), and the ancient gods have been freed from their imprisonment in Hell, ready to reclaim their ancestral thrones. The magic sword is not lost in this transition, however. It is only un-inverted when the warrior kneels before his gods, driving his blade into the earth in obeisance. While this does signify submission, it is essentially a submission to nature and, importantly, the sword remains a sword. What makes these gods different from those of Christianity is their source—rather than being imposed from above, they have been uncovered by the individual through this gnosis of the sword.

And so what, if anything, actually separates fascist black metal from the rest? I posit that fascist black metal falls short of a truly courageous nigredo, it emphasizes the pernicious and degenerative influence of outsiders rather than allowing Satan completely into the soul. For those fascists, they are still under the cross, even if it is an iron cross. Their weapons will ever only be vehicles of ego, never the

magic sword of the warrior, that "sovereign aspect that will serve no master and that refuses all forms of subordination,"[8] the magic sword that is the key of power, that unlocks the passage between worlds.

In the introduction to *Gods of the Blood: The Pagan Revival and White Separatism*, Mattias Gardell explicates the basic mythology of fascism, which "[projects] the idea of a corporative nation back into legendary or mythological time, often presented as a 'golden age,' a time untainted by the ills of the modern world and liberated from whomever is designated the national enemy."[9] The mythological "past" summoned in black metal is certainly romanticized, but simultaneously, it is depicted as a brutal, cold, and bestial state. This "past" is a metaphor for "primitive" or "bestial" states of consciousness descended to in the course of black metal lycanthropy. Like the land, it is a metaphor for the wilderness of the human spirit.

Take Emperor's *I Am the Black Wizards*. In order to "gather wisdom now lost" one must visit "*eternally ancient* caves." This source of wisdom from beneath the earth has always been and always will be ancient, because its ancientness is a mythological quality rather than a reference to material history, i.e., politics. It is also worth noting that the chthonic destroyer-god (perhaps Satan) who narrates *I Am the Black Wizards* takes care to explain that there is not only no privileged time in his mythic system ("No age will escape my wrath"), but no privileged space either ("My empires has no limits / From the never ending / Mountains black, to the bottomless lakes / I am the ruler and has been for eternity's long [sic]").[10]

I will end with a brief examination of Mayhem's *Grand Declaration of War*. The album is regarded by many purists as a failed experiment, but in my opinion it is not only a beautiful work of art, but, like many great works of Metal, a fascinating occult document as well. Though truly it deserves a more comprehensive analysis than what follows, I think this will suffice as a brief illustration of the points of this essay.

It opens with the song "A Grand Declaration of War," which establishes the album's musical atmosphere—spiraling, evocative guitar work that is equally stark and romantic, that pauses and pounces and rends like a lion. Military-style snare rolls emerge to accompany the lyrical declaration itself:

> Christendom . . . Religion of pity . . . God of the sick.
> We have discovered our way . . . we know the road
> We have found the way out of millennia of labyrinth[11]

Who is this "we" being invoked right at the start? As we shall see, it is of course the "army" of black metal "warriors." "The warrior is a metaphor, a character," not any specific person, but in the work the warrior is invoked, and we should

understand the persona of *Grand Declaration* to be such a character, our psychopomp for the journey that follows.[12]

The declaration continues: "There was a thunderstorm in our air / The nature which we are grew dark."[13] Lightning is the masculine energy of the cosmos that awakens the internal fire, but the "thunderstorm" is also the chaos and darkness of modernity. The warrior has "found the way out of millennia of labyrinth," survived throughout history now to be freshly invoked by black metal in this age of darkness. Or is it the opposite, the practitioner who has discovered "the way" of the warrior? But now to the heart of the declaration:

> We declare not peace but WAR
> We shall be unleashed now
> From darkness we create light
> Beware decaying humans
> For we shall destroy
> We are the way of millenniums to come[14]

In the following song, "In the Lies Where Upon You Lay," the persona continues to define himself and the aspect of the warrior: "We the hunters of the hollow hills . . . We the soul of the earth."[15] As we have already discussed, black metal seeks the buried, forgotten, profaned, or forbidden spiritual energy of the land, and it is the warrior (or the "hunter," an even more primal vision of masculinity) who, not only has access to this energy, but embodies it.

> Into the night we must go, into the darkest abyss
> To a level of consciousness unknown to Christendom
> We want life, we crush the dream of heaven
> As we bring the blade down, one swift move
> We are the chosen ones, chosen by will to life.[16]

This is the way to "awaken the beast within." These words, so lucid and powerful, almost require no commentary. But the magic blade does appear here for the first time, and we see it not only as a weapon capable of destroying illusions, but as an embodiment of the warrior's vitality. "You lifeliars crawl on your bended knees / As you finally die, you will eventually have lost more / By not living by the sword than what you lose in death." The sword is life—these "lifeliars," "priests," the warrior's spiritual enemies, were already dead. Their blood is "repulsive," whereas the warrior's blood beats with the "pulse of omnipotent strength" because it is synchronized with the earth. "The blood of others is of a colder substance and

taste," says the warrior, "Therefore I must spill and serve / The blood that in me runs vibrant."[17]

Further into the album, in the song "A View From Nihil (Part I)," the military snare rolls return with this pronouncement:

> In the frost of the dying minds
> of western society I recreate
> It will be the resurrection
> Of the brotherhood of holy death
> In the year of the Holy Roman Empire
> Of night times to come and last
> The day of which I shall
> Lay my sword upon your throats
> Upon the mighty warriors
> Of the land of northern regions.[18]

The "brotherhood of holy death," the same "army of pureness" referenced earlier, placed "behind the burning lake," is resurrected, as in, brought out from its exile in Hell and back into the "dying minds of western society." "A View From Nihil (Part I)" ends with a reaffirmation of the spiritual rather than ethnic nature of the warrior's brotherhood: "And so I greet those who still have eyes to observe and see / And who still have courage to break through into the dying light." The "chosen ones" of *Grand Declaration of War* are not a racial elite, they are the initiates of the warrior's way, those who seek the "dying light," which has been forgotten and polluted in this late age of the earth. If we were to continue our analysis of the album, however, we would see this light renewed, as the warrior promised at the very beginning, through a process he calls his "reconstruction from deconstruction."[19]

Noys asks "Can we recuperate the staging of the 'bare noise and pulse of the modern world' as the nihilist critique of what Badiou calls 'capitalo-parliamentarianism' without the embarrassing archaic fascist nostalgia?"[20] The rather obvious answer is yes: It's called punk. According to Jung:

> The symbolism of the rites of renewal . . . points far beyond the merely archaic and infantile to man's innate psychic disposition, which is the result and deposit of all ancestral life right down to the animal level—hence the ancestor and animal symbolism. The rites are attempts to abolish the separation between the conscious mind and the unconscious, the real source of

life, and to bring about a reunion of the individual with the native soil of his inherited, instinctive make-up.[21]

Black metal is the "resurrection of the brotherhood of holy death," the summoning of the warrior archetype and the ancestral sword, the reconnection with a mythological heritage that is not a "Golden Age" of material history but a living spiritual fact of the here and now. It is no coincidence that fascists use similar or identical images and myths—it is incredibly powerful magic, and its associations with war and masculinity can make it especially useful for convincing young men to kill each other. Black metal, however, is the true meaning of this ancestral magic, where "blood," "native soil," and the sword are not mere flags for the superficial mythologies of racism; they are the path through which "we awaken the beast within."

NOTES

[1] Benjamin Noys, "'*Remain True to the Earth!*': Remarks on the Politics of Black Metal," *Hideous Gnosis: Black Metal Theory Symposium 1,* ed. Nicola Masciandaro (CreateSpace, 2010), 114–115.

[2] Scott Wilson, "BAsileus philosoPHOrum METaloricum," *Hideous Gnosis: Black Metal Theory Symposium 1*, ed. Nicola Masciandaro (CreateSpace, 2010), 39.

[3] Encyclopaedia Metallum, "Don't Burn the Witch," from "Venom, *Black Metal*," http://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Venom/Black_Metal/861.

[4] Noys, "'*Remain True to the Earth!*'," *Hideous Gnosis*, 108.

[5] Noys, "'*Remain True to the Earth!*'," *Hideous Gnosis*, 112.

[6] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 144.

[7] C.G. Jung, "Individual Dream Symbolism in Relation to Alchemy," *Dreams*, trans. R.F.C. Hull (New York: MJF Books), 205.

[8] Wilson, "BAsileus philosoPHOrum METaloricum," 40.

[9] Mattias Gardell, *Gods of the Blood: The Pagan Revival and White Separatism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 5.

[10] Encyclopaedia Metallum, "Emperor, *In the Nightside Eclipse*," http://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Emperor/In_the_Nightside_Eclipse/93. Emphasis added.

[11] Encyclopaedia Metallum, "Mayhem, *Grand Declaration of War*," http://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Mayhem/Grand_Declaration_of_War/3879.

[12] Wilson, "BAsileus philosoPHOrum METaloricum," 39.

[13] Encyclopaedia Metallum, "Mayhem, *Grand Declaration of War*."

[14] Encyclopaedia Metallum, "Mayhem, *Grand Declaration of War*."

[15] Encyclopaedia Metallum, "Mayhem, *Grand Declaration of War*."

[16] Encyclopaedia Metallum, "Mayhem, *Grand Declaration of War*."

[17] Encyclopaedia Metallum, "Mayhem, *Grand Declaration of War*."
[18] Encyclopaedia Metallum, "Mayhem, *Grand Declaration of War*."
[19] Encyclopaedia Metallum, "Mayhem, *Grand Declaration of War*."
[20] Noys, "'*Remain True to the Earth!*'," 114–115.
[21] C.G. Jung, "Individual Dream Symbolism in Relation to Alchemy," 211.

A Sterile Hole and a Mask of Feces

Bert Stabler

Gnaw Their Tongues' album title *An Epiphanic Vomiting of Blood*[1] is a concise example of black metal's theme of ecstatic disintegration made tangible in violent outward expression—a slaughterhouse revelation, exposing what was hidden. This purging recalls both the self-emptying (kenosis) of Gospel theology and G.W.F. Hegel's telos of self-overcoming ("sublation," or *"Aufhebung"*), inverting the deadlock, turning oneself inside-out and thereby becoming transparent, masochistically abandoning oneself to the environment, incorporating it and being incorporated by it. Gilles Deleuze says the masochist does not derive most of his pleasure from pain; rather, his "real pleasure is obtained subsequently, in that which is made possible by the punishment."[2] This suspended gratification evokes the self-transcending "surplus-enjoyment" represented in the Resurrection, following the self-annihilating degradation in the Incarnation and the Passion. This is the sacrifice that believers are to mirror in order to receive the blessing of divine grace, as set forth by theologians from Paul to St. John of the Cross to St. Ignatius Loyola to Kierkegaard. In black metal, this rebirth for which "creation groans" follows many revivals, from the Renaissance through Romanticism, in its nostalgia for a golden age of occult magic. It appears in lyrics as the return of a latent pagan-barbarian consciousness; Satyricon screams, "In this land where the forest is my throne / I have come to re-hunt,"[3] and Katharsis shrieks: "The sleeper will wake and the world will bleed."[4]

The self-cannibalizing and subsequent self-expulsion of these linked zeitgeists is not unlike that associated with trauma. "For just as Jonah was three nights and three days in the belly of the sea monster," Jesus says, "so will be the Son of Man three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."[5] "Panic, hysteria, infernally raging chaos," screams Funeral Mist, "Salvation through destruction / Cold black sun of hope."[6] And in her book *Black Sun*, Julia Kristeva quotes the moment of

expulsion in the *Iliad* when "Bellerophon gave offense to the gods and became a lonely wanderer on the Aleian plain, eating out his heart and shunning the paths of men."[7] The sovereign eater is revealed to be merely a temporarily indigestible hole in the world.

Kristeva explains that "the depressed person has the impression of having been deprived . . . of something unrepresentable, that perhaps only devouring might signify."[8] But this "unrepresentable" kernel of sublime absence fuels not depression for Arthur Schopenhauer, but rather his deific vision of the subject as that "which knows all things and is known by none."[9] Jean-Marie Schaeffer speaks for the late eighteenth-century German Romantic poet, philosopher, and Neoplatonist mystic Novalis: "Only poetic creation has access to an ecstatic contemplation in which the poet is at once subject and object, self and world."[10] Like Schopenhauer and Novalis, Richard Wagner mistook masochistic solipsism for sublime triumph. Nietzsche mocked Wagner thusly: "He who overthrows us is strong, he who elevates us is godly, he who makes us wonder vaguely is profound."[11] For Nietzsche, the fact of flat, absolute materiality denies all depth, but nonetheless gives rise to fantasies of sovereignty; for him, "the body despairs of the body when it cannot bear its own experience or digest its suffering," says Melissa Orlie.[12] Nietzsche's embodied ethics of pleasure, power, and despair is confused with an incoherent mystical oral fixation by Reza Negarestani, for whom "Hegelism and taste is a stupid effort to hide the nihilistic carnage of mouth . . . it is whitewashing our domesticating hunger, jealousy, and racial segregation that we undertake against the mouth."[13] Aspasia Stephanou cites Negarestani in order to ascribe in black metal a gluttonous nirvana beyond language "where all abject material is never abjected."[14]

Stephanou wants to oppose this pandemonium of unspeaking, non-shitting orality to an idea of Hegel that equates his thought with an allegedly capitalistic erasure of difference.[15] But for Hegel there is no ultimate negation of difference, much less a nihilist's consumerist dream of perpetual enjoyment in undifferentiated chthonic essence, "an openness where everything becomes anonymous."[16] Instead of Negarestani's spuriously infinite consumption as an awakening of ancient nature, there is despair. Marginality erupts from empty clamor and expends itself in incompleteness, non-totality. For Hegel, as limned by Slavoj Žižek, the universal Absolute is a continual spiritual self-differentiation, a tearing within that is then externalized, inner contradictions resolving into subjectivity through reconciliation in the shared world.[17] Hegel replaces Kant's inaccessible things-in-themselves with a relationship in which consciousness and its content can rupture one another, incorporate one another, embracing conflict, canceling and trans-

forming falsity and evil, with gaps not erased or blamed on understanding, but discovered through waste in reality itself.[18]

As Stephanou mentions in a footnote, Žižek pursues Hegel's motif of digestion, setting up an excremental metaphor in which sublated content is released, abrogated, and yet reiterated, reborn, in what Mladen Dolar calls an *Aufhebung* of *Aufhebung*."[19] "If I eat an apple," Hegel says, "I destroy its organic self-identity . . . having in itself a homogeneity with my digestive organs such that I can make it homogeneous with myself."[20] In Hegel's apple, so in the spirit—what was interior is mangled, disintegrated, and extruded, in order to be externally "healed" into a new non-totality. For Stephanou, this mutual incorporation is neither sufficiently nihilistic (singular eater) nor multicultural (assimilated apple)—and yet, the apple lives on, distributing its seeds through shit (or trash). Inner potential only finds truth in external expression—the universal ideal notion meets objective nature in the specific idea: excrement. "Out of the foaming ferment of finitude," Hegel muses on the john, "spirit rises up fragrantly."[21]

Spinoza's undivided, universal, uniform "substance" comprising reality becomes for Hegel, with the splitting of self-recognition, an aware "subject," revealed through free externalization of the contingent, mortal, incomplete individual. Egoistic "positivity," a la Schopenhauer, is in Hegel a false unity that overwhelms the subject without the restraint of negativity, the empty opposition from which the subject springs. Negativity is the force driving the dialectic, and thus the movement of freedom in human history. "That which enables the notion to advance itself," he says in the introduction to the *Science of Logic*, "is . . . the negative which it possesses within itself."[22] And so this negative is made positive through expression. For Hegel, the image of God is its truth; yet iconoclasm, in the Protestant ethic he embraces, suspends all transient positivity in the name of essence, the as-yet unrevealed and undifferentiated Absolute—which for Hegel is both empty and self-sundering. Two examples may illuminate the complex relationship between contingent positivity and negative essence—one in regard to race and masks, and the other addressing sexuality and shit—before moving on to visceral and visual statements about empire, cruelty, and law.

More than the white corpsepaint associated with black metal musicians, the most iconic and incendiary painted face in popular Western culture may be blackface—famously used by European Americans to portray African Americans as buffoons, but, also used early on among blacks to appropriate and caricature white racist depictions of blacks.[23] And it should be noted that blacks were also early adopters of "whiteface," from the portrayals of Europeans among colonized and enslaved Africans up to, in recent history, Michael Jackson. Discussing the pale

suburban animated corpses of George Romero's zombie movies, Richard Dyer makes explicit these connections between whiteness and death in his book *White*.[24] One could see how the voudou-like makeup still used by bands like Immortal allows a Eurocentric aesthetic to be exported, as with the Indonesian black metal band Kiamat Orchestra, Taiwan's Chthonic, South Africa's Soul Devourer, South Korea's Pyha, Peru's Anal Vomit, and countless others. There are plenty of ways for white face paint to resonate symbolically in various contexts (just take Johnny Depp's indigenous-Goth posturing in *The Lone Ranger*—please). Nonetheless, whiteness on whites, like blackness on blacks, and like Hegel's characterization of philosophy painting "gray on gray,"[25] is a redundant abstraction of flesh illuminating the hole at the heart of identity, via the "minimal difference" of tautology—a gap "that hints at an obscene contingent underside,"[26] perhaps at the other end of the tract.

Despite geographic, cultural, and economic differences, ghostly projected and repressed memories of traumatic colonization are central to modern consciousness. Not much is known about Vikings, but they are remembered as conquerors—much as African diaspora identities are widely perceived within the legacy of subjugation and slavery. But the dominated have become both despised and fetishized, and the black face of buffoonery denotes envy for fierce, mocking, emptied subjects that have to some degree come to identify self-destructively with their enemies, but have also, following the kind of liberation trauma Hegel identified in France's post-revolutionary Terror, come into a full (though bitter) autonomy, apart from power.[27] Conversely, after the barbarians conquered the conquerors, and northern Europe became the imperial seat, the white face of elitist cruelty has come to belie the repressed perversion of masochist excess. The corpsepaint-blackface pairing calls to mind the Prague Museum of Medieval Torture's display of historic torture masks, some of which were worn by torturers, and others by victims. When Funeral Mist proclaims, "Cleanse me now, bind the flesh, / So that I can receive thy punishment with dignity, with dignity / Make use of me! Make use of this flame, / So that I can receive thy ineffable splendour with dignity, with dignity,"[28] and "Fetter the flesh, choke the sin . . . Enslave and use me / I breathe only to take the form thou wish,"[29] the fantasy of the master covets the strength of the slave.

In *Debt: The First 5,000 Years,* a history of civilization as an expanding network of quantified financial obligations and violent bodily subjections, David Graeber traces the foundation of modern Western law to Roman conceptions of property as the relation between a human and a thing[30]—a relationship that is nonsensical (albeit somewhat Kantian) until recognizing the "thing" as a slave. Graeber goes on to

describe the king and the slave, both marginal figures in their own way, as central to the hermetically isolated individual posited by contract law. The master-slave dynamic is central for Hegel, of course, who does not fail to draw out the mutual alienation that Giorgio Agamben later termed "the state of exception," external to society. The identity of the State hinges on the figure of a necessary term that lies outside itself; this can be a glorified yet ultimately impotent figure like the king, as described by Hegel,[31] or the abject yet essential figure of the slave, prisoner, enemy, etc. The coexistence in one scene of bands respectively called Enthroned and Enslaved starts to make more sense. Both names represent a thoroughly external subject, whose purity consists in exclusion from moral protection and culpability, the curious DuBois-esque "double consciousness" of the modern laborer-consumer, duty-bound hedonism canceled by contractual asceticism, bound and flagellated by a missing, connecting term. "Militant men in peaceful times attack themselves," Mayhem chants.[32]

To wear one's cultural identity as a mask is not to borrow from a signifying field (the nation, the market, or the body) but to externalize an ontological position (the spirit, a shared history, or the drives). "For the individuality," says Hegel, "it is as much its countenance as its mask that it can lay aside."[33] As pedantic as the distinction of "true" versus "false" Metal may seem, such vigilant fidelity to one's desire seems sympathetic to a transgender-informed vision of art,[34] despite the persistence of homophobia among some metalheads (certainly not all). Indeed, some qualities of all-male environments, like the military, boarding schools, and prisons, may apply to heavy music scenes, as suggested by the unambiguously out (but nonetheless hate-filled) former Gorgoroth frontman Gaahl. Metal's expressions of isolation and fantasies of simultaneous mortification and glorification, not to mention the idyllic neoclassical landscapes and narratives of operatic tragedy, are motifs that resonate with the nostalgic character of the gay aesthete.[35] On a more subtle tack, Lee Edelman's book on queerness and the death drive, *No Future*, is a collection of perverse readings of discourses around childhood and family that would seem to echo the black metal vision of nature in revolt against pseudo-organic social artifice. This revolt is displayed dramatically in the upsetting of interspecies relations Edelman analyzes in Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds*, in which birds act in legion to isolate and tear humans to pieces.[36]

The human and animal antiheroes that disrupt normative "healthy" relations in *No Future* are not unlike Christ, an uncanny obstacle to imperial and religious authorities of his time. "Do not think that I came to bring peace on Earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword," says Jesus, "For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her

mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be the members of his household."[37] Like teeth, the sword divides the flesh of the family into particles, with all roles demolished and innards exposed. Jean-Luc Nancy proposes that "the Hegelian world is the world in which no generality subsists, only infinite singularities."[38] The brutality required to sustain the patriarchy will be dispersed when the heterosexual order of descent and ownership is chopped into an anarchic storm, civilization torn apart and bodies merged with the landscape. "Since hatred of the Other was already considered 'older than love,'" Kristeva inquires, "would such a masochistic withdrawal of hatred point to a yet more archaic hatred?"[39] Restating this, evoking both metal and Hegel, Jesus says in reference to himself, "If Satan casts out Satan, how then will his kingdom stand?"[40]

Leo Bersani and Adam Phillips' book *Intimacies* also takes on the masochistic contempt of the flesh (and the soul), also connecting queer eros and thanatos. The authors analyze the AIDS-era practice of unprotected gay group sex known as "barebacking," and relate it to the seventeenth-century "pure love" school of (heretical) Catholic theology. In "pure love," one is to release the absolute adoration of God from all hopes of reward, even presuming that one's soul will be annihilated at death, or will be condemned to eternal hellfire. "(P)ure love demands . . . a saintly hatred of oneself, a perfect passivity toward God's will, and . . . total self-divestiture."[41] This is tied up for Bersani and Phillips with a larger discussion of the despised "feminine" role in gay male sexuality, that of the "bottom," the penetrated—a role that, as historian John Boswell notes, has received far more censure throughout Western history than that of the penetrator.[42] But this is (literally) nature as civilization's "obscene underside," extolled by black metal in hymns for the accursed. The desire to be penetrated and debased is hinted at when 1349 says, "My call is answered / By force am I taken to realms, darker than death,"[43] but its ecstatic necessity is explicit when Watain says, "Step aside for lord Sathanas / His fist so deep within / A servant am I and in flesh am I captured."[44] Nothing is more "unnatural" than nature itself.

As obsessed as black metal has been with codes of heroic honor, as in the well-known case of white-supremacist murderer and black metal innovator Varg Vikernes, a.k.a. Burzum, it is hard, in the light of "pure love," not to hear the cacophonic grandeur as a sinister invitation to womblike oceanic bliss, a borderless panoramic pre-anality that recalls the pastoral nostalgia of German Romantic poet Friedrich Hölderlin, or the hazy atmospheric vistas of Ukranian nationalist black metal band Drudkh. The gap offered by the open, unclenched anus is the aperture of the camera obscura that inverts the image of the land, repeating it but isolating it from the brutal history that parceled it as territory, allowing origins to be posited

retroactively in community. Hell yields bliss, hate becomes love, ashes bring forth life, filth creates food, individuals are released from the family and from civilization. The primordial inversion may be the advent of the sentient being as a self-conscious orphan of its environment, "an anamorphic distortion of nature."[45] Excluded by all around her, she is also excluded by the shared abstraction of language that makes her a stranger to nature, and gives her tombstone a name while she remains alive. The "great sorrow of Nature" that Schelling attributed to its muteness, its lack of words, is reversed by Derrida, who says that it is "nature's sadness or mourning that renders it sad or aphasic, that leaves it without words."[46] "Where the howling winds rage" screams Satyricon, "And the mountains are majestic / I can breathe and where there is / Human flesh I feel strangled."[47] "Life is not the answer / The hands are rotten," quoth Horna.[48] And Darkthrone: "I was, indeed, a King of the Flesh . . . but asketh thou: Closed are the Gates?"[49] Perhaps they must be; nature as described by Hegel is an idea of total exteriority, even to itself.

The closed anal boundary has everything to do with power. For Freud feces stood in for money and wealth, and David Graeber links money to both the Romantic and Chinese etymology of "symbolism" itself,[50] so there may be no more compelling Biblical image of the anal retentive than the rich man whose path to Heaven is more difficult than the passage of a camel through a needle's eye.[51] Christ instead describes wisdom as total self-expenditure, returning always to the free use of money. In abandoning grandeur, identifying defilement in the comfort of conscience or circumstance, there is an inversion of filth that informs the judgment of the beatitudes, blessing all the besmirched—the meek, the mournful, the merciful, the insulted, the persecuted, the peacemakers, the pure in heart and poor in spirit, those who want righteousness. Only the partially-digested and shat-upon are saved, only weakness, suffering, and want bring about repentance and release. Similarly, the despairing subject in Hegel's *Phenomenology,* says Katrin Pahl, "loses its head, its every bone is broken, it self-digests, its spirit is crushed but restless."[52] Yet in a typical fantasy of the elite overman, Svarttjern declares, "You pitiful, weak, and poor / Your tears strike every other than I."[53] To the extent black metal affects solitary supremacy, it represses the despondent masochistic content of its own expulsive dissonance, furious yet passive, in which the sounds of self-release into unbounded continuity oppose alienated self-containment and constipated accumulation. The romance of a hermetically insular, organically unified totality is pierced by black metal's jagged, discontinuous soundscape.

Jesus tauntingly condemns man's retentive inner darkness when he says, "There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things

that come out of a person are what defile him."[54] There is no magical sublimation within; like Bertha Mason, the hysterical attic-bound captive Creole "with dark, grizzled hair" in *Jane Eyre*, genocide unrepented continuously haunts the colonizer like a mad ghost. This image of confinement may be opposed to the woman at the house of Simon the leper who breaks open the jar of exceedingly costly perfume and anoints Jesus with it ("the spirit rises up fragrantly"); the disciples criticize this grand expenditure and are rebuked by Jesus, while, at the same time, Judas accepts payment for his betrayal.[55] The broken jar is a body freed of the soul's putrefying sin in the overpowering incense of love, while, all around, morality is negotiated as lives are bought and sold.

An opposed Messiah of olfactory desire is found in the German author Patrick Susskind's novel *Perfume* (beloved by Kurt Cobain), in which Grenouille, a man who is born without odor but has an unusual ability to perceive smells apprentices as a perfume maker and accidentally kills a virgin girl with whose scent he becomes obsessed. In seeking a perfect perfume, he ends up killing a large number of virgins in a village in order to harvest their odors. When Grenouille is caught, he escapes execution with the smell of his perfume, which induces reverent awe and incites a mass orgy. But, weary of both solitude and companionship, he seeks death by dousing himself in his perfume, causing him to be torn apart and eaten by a group of criminals[56]—a Last Supper worthy of Bataille, whose book *Eroticism,* Žižek notes, features a photograph of a person being torn to pieces.[57]

The hypnotic smell in *Perfume* is neither love nor rot, but merely a stand-in for the skeptical, speculative faculty of vision, the calculating titillation both of Judas and the scolding apostles. Coercion is a technique of anal control and optical pleasure, of both power and slavery, as when the image of a white or black face functions as a simultaneous assertion and deformation of group identity. Against nature, says Žižek, "the infinite spiritual good . . . is ultimately the mask of evil."[58] Violence is emphatically not a tool of morality; nor, for that matter, amorality; rather, both are tools of violence. In the figure of Grenouille we see what Lacan identified in Sade as the "symptom of Kant,"[59] a thoroughly abstract, judgmental, retentive obsession with going to the limit of transgression as an internalization and validation of the prohibitive Law of patriarchy (as both a king and a slave). Not a reversal of the Law but a reassertion of it in something shared and nonlinguistic, an authentic existence for which black metal pines (among the pines). Jesus, however, transgresses punishment itself. In God's blasphemous agony, degrading death, and impossible re-Incarnation, as in the anticipation, repetition, and remembrance in the Eucharist, "the gap between the universal content and its representation was closed."[60]

Reincarnation through representation also applies thematically to black metal. Immortal says, "As a Norse warrior I rode the dark valleys / With longsword in hand sworn to throne dark lands."[61] But the pagan ferocity of corpsepainted Scandanavian church burners looks more than anything like an updated Reformation, with the militarized Lutheran-Prussian State revered by Hegel in *The Philosophy of Right*, contemporary with the Wagnerian Viking revival period of the nineteenth century, a more apt setting for the grim protagonists of kvlt dirges than the obscure world of the original Norse warriors. The black metal scene is then a distorted revival of a distorted revival, a universal-isolationist voice of postcolonial provincialism—a concrete, located universality, a reborn "traditional" worldview framed by the negativity of traumatic conquest. The negative struggle to resist (or pillage) the Roman imperialist is pure, but the land and invented history being defended are never pure, as concrete truth in Hegel is never pure. Yet, while the vast icy landscapes on Metal album covers and in Romantic poetry are mythic, they provide a ground for a neo-medieval global localism, summarized by Antonio Negri's Hegelian dismissal of neutral authority: "Reality is not universal but radically unilateral," he says, "it is praxis that anticipates and risks itself by constructing itself as a particular power."[62] In this black and white post-colonial moment, there's no neoliberal straddling of the fence between conqueror and conquered—merely the overthrowing of all domination.

In the imperialist cross of the Holy Roman emperor Constantine, and of all Christian conquerors thereafter (the Marquis de Sade included, I humbly submit), punishment was sanctified, forgiveness forgotten, subject bodies enumerated, and wounds of infinite debt reopened. Christ (and Peter) reverse Rome's cross, but Rome reasserts its sadistic spectacle, so that it may be eventually destroyed, with death itself devoured and shat out, itself the final inert remainder, what Brecht called "the last piece of dirt with whose removal the room will be clean."[63] 1349 again: "I behold thousands of claws gripping the golden cross from behind / Soon demons crawl like furious ants all over / the profaned shape / Screaming in unearthly rage and insanity / the symbol of Nazarene is torn asunder / dripping with slime and rot"[64] (note "from behind," and the echo of queer artist David Wojnarowicz's infamous video of a crucifixion seething with ants).

As if anticipating Negarestani and Stephanou, Hegel says admiringly of animals that they "do not stand idly in front of sensuous things as if they possessed intrinsic being . . . but fall to without ceremony and eat them up."[65] In Hegel's dialectic passage from being through nothing to becoming, we can recognize "wolves evolving," the image of a reawakened bestial dynamism provided by Ulver to answer the prompt "sounds like:" on their Myspace page. This conjures in turn

Deleuze's "becoming-animal" vision of a mutating spirit dispersed and reorganized in communal flux. But it also recalls the Hegelian insight that it takes a transcendental Lawgiver to make a man into a wolf.[66] The wolf may evolve by becoming rather than obeying the Law, succumbing erotically to the pure negative contradiction that permits subjectivity. But a human lawgiver, as Graeber points out, can make a man into a thing. The delirious anguish of self-objectification is characterized by Watain as "the enduring of rupturing cold / Brought to life, crushed to dust / By an impenetrable presence of dark."[67] "For those who are depressed," Kristeva says, "the Thing, like the Self, is a downfall that carries them along into the invisible and unnameable . . . Waste and cadavers all."[68] Two song titles from Gnaw Their Tongues' *An Epiphanic Vomiting of Blood* come to mind: "My Body Is Not a Vessel, Nor a Temple. It's a Repulsive Pile of Sickness," and "Sawn Asunder and Left for the Beasts."[69]

Perhaps the disintegrative force of inversion is not a mystical return to a primal and pure source, not a blank quantified abstraction in an infinite void, not the nihilist "night in which all cows are black" Hegel snarkily attributes to Schelling in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, not the faux-heroic Sadean / Satanic / neo-Nordic flaunting of dogma, in slavery to a skeptic's fantasy of sovereignty. The ecstatic effect may instead be a frozen orgasmic baptism of self-annihilation, an atavistic negation of inward negativity, a cleansing bath of blood, feces, and offal, an asshole made pure by inversion. What Lacan describes as the non-phallic "supplementary jouissance" beyond the Self, accessible only to women, is echoed faintly for all animals in the impossible traversal of the anus by the unclean simulation of birth, the illusion of creation, vomiting or excreting the reeking dark remainder that permits the fantastic restoration of the spirit released into nature. Hidden and decayed, the interior filth of the drives, the unconscious essence, can enter the light and be transmuted, negativity rejoined with contingent external substance. William Desmond characterizes Hegel's God as "making faces of himself in immanence and seeing himself again in those faces."[70] Or, perhaps, those feces. Regardless, as individuals we both transcend and become ourselves by releasing the captive marginalized Other within, through the mask offered to God and the mask God shows us in return, a terrible non-face that defines and defies the boundaries of reason.

NOTES
[1] Gnaw Their Tongues, *An Epiphanic Vomiting of Blood* (Burning World Records, 2007; Crucial Blast, 2009).

[2] Gilles Deleuze, *Coldness and Cruelty*, trans. Jean McNeil (New York: Zone Books, 1989), 77.

[3] Satyricon, "The Forest Is My Throne," *The Forest Is My Throne / Yggdrasill* split LP (Moonfog Productions, 1995).

[4] Katharsis, "Infernal Solar Vortexx," *Kruzifixxion* (Norma Evangelium Diaboli, 2003).

[5] Matthew 12:40, *New American Standard Bible.*

[6] Funeral Mist, "Sun of Hope," *Salvation* (Norma Evangelium Diaboli, 2003).

[7] Quoted in Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon S. Rpudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 7.

[8] Kristeva, *Black Sun,* 13.

[9] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. Judith Norman, Alistair Welchman, Christopher Janaway (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University, 2010), 5.

[10] Jean-Marie Schaeffer, *Art of the Modern Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 125.

[11] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner, Nietzsche contra Wagner, and Selected Aphorisms,* trans Anthony M. Ludovici (Los Angeles: Library of Alexandria, 1964), 122.

[12] Melissa A. Orlie, "Impersonal Matter," in eds. Diane Coole and Samantha Frost, *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University, 2010), 121.

[13] Quoted by Aspasia Stephanou, "Black Metal and the Mouth, *Always Serving You as a Meal,* or, Infected Orality, Pestilential Wounds and Scabs," in *Glossator 6: Black Metal*, eds. Nicola Masciandaro and Reza Negarestani (CreateSpace, 2012), 49.

[14] Stephanou, "Black Metal and the Mouth," 48.

[15] Stephanou, "Black Metal and the Mouth," 50.

[16] Stephanou, "Black Metal and the Mouth," 60.

[17] Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2012), 321.

[18] Adrian Johnston, "The Weakness of Nature: Hegel, Freud, Lacan, and Negativity Materialized," in *Hegel & the Infinite: Religion, Politics, and Dialectic*, eds. Clayton Crockett, Creston Davis, and Slavoj Žižek (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 172–74.

[19] Mladen Dolar, "The Voice and the Stone: From Hegel to Beckett," http://coolessay.org/docs/index-116495.html.

[20] Slavoj Žižek, "Hegel and Shitting," in Crockett et al., *Hegel & the Infinite,* 221.

[21] Quoted in Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 402.

[22] Quoted in Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 144.

[23] Yuval Taylo and Jake Austen, *Darkest America: Black Minstrelsy from Slavery to Hip-Hop* (London: W.W. Norton & Co., 2012), 20–49.

[24] Richard Dyer, *White: Essays on Race and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 209–212.

[25] Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 320.

[26] Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 322.

[27] Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 370.

[28] Funeral Mist, "Breathing Wounds," *Salvation*.

[29] Funeral Mist, "Holy Poison," *Salvation*.

[30] David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (New York: Melville House Publishing, 2011), 199–207.

[31] Žižek, *Less Than Nothing,* 354.

[32] Mayhem, "The Vortex Void of Inhumanity," *Wolf's Lair Abyss* EP (Misanthropy Records, 1997).

[33] Quoted in Žižek, *Less Than Nothing,* 377.

[34] See, for example, Julia Serano's book *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity* (Emeryville: Seal Press, 2007).

[35] I draw on the excellent survey of this discourse in Christopher Reed's *Art and Homosexuality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[36] Lee Edelman, *No Future* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 118–154.

[37] Matthew 10:34–36, *New American Standard Bible*.

[38] Bruno Bosteels, "Hegel in America," in Crockett et al., *Hegel & the Infinite*, 77.

[39] Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 16.

[40] Matthew 12:26, *New American Standard Bible*.

[41] Leo Bersani and Adam Phillips, *Intimacies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 53.

[42] John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 57.

[43] 1349, "I Breathe Spears," *Liberation* (Candlelight Records, 2003).

[44] Watain, "Walls of Life Ruptured," *Rabid Death's Curse* (Drakkar Productions, 2000).

[45] Žižek, *Less Than Nothing,* 416.

[46] Quoted in Žižek, *Less Than Nothing,* 412.

[47] Satyricon, "Immortality Passion," *Nemesis Divina* (Moonfog Productions, 1996).

[48] Horna, "Sword of Darkness," *Kohti Yhdeksan Noudua* (Solistitium Records, 1998).

[49] Darkthrone, "Where Cold Winds Blow," *A Blaze In The Northern Sky* (Peaceville Records, 1992).

[50] Graeber, *Debt,* 298.

[51] "Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God," Matthew 19:24, *New International Version*.

[52] Katrin Pahl, "The Way of Despair," in Crockett et al., *Hegel & the Infinite*, 148.

[53] Svarttjern, "Stillborn Acolyte," *Misanthropic Path of Madness* (Schwarzdorn Productions, 2009).

[54] Mark 7:15, *English Standard Version*.

[55] Mark 14:1–9, *English Standard Version*.

[56] "Perfume (novel)," *Wikipedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perfume_(novel).

[57] Slavoj Žižek, "The Christian-Hegelian Comedy," *Cabinet* 17 (Spring 2005), online edition http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/17/zizek.php.

[58] Slavoj Žižek, *Violence* (Picador, 2008), 66.

[59] Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 94.

[60] Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 97.

[61] Immortal, "A Sign for the Norse Horde to Ride," *Pure Holocaust* (Osmose Productions, 1993).

[62] Antonio Negri, "Rereading Hegel: The Philosopher of Right" in Crockett et al., *Hegel & the Infinite*, 44.

[63] Bertolt Brecht paraphrased by Žižek in "Some Politically Incorrect Reflections on Violence in France & Other Matters: 1. Violence, Rational and Irrational" *Lacan* (2005), http://www.lacan.com/zizfrance.htm.

[64] 1349, "I Breathe Spears."

[65] Quoted in Pahl, "The Way of Despair," 146.

[66] Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 313.

[67] Watain, "Rabid Death's Curse," *Rabid Death's Curse* (Drakkar Productions, 2000).

[68] Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 15.

[69] Gnaw Their Tongues, *An Epiphanic Vomiting of Blood.*

[70] William Desmond, "Between Finitude and Infinity: On Hegel's Sublationary Infinitism," in Crockett et al., *Hegel & the Infinite*, 125.

ECCENTRICITIES AND DISORIENTATIONS

Experiencing Geometricies in Black Metal

curated by Amelia Ishmael and Elodie Lesourd

Andrew McLeod
Dimitris Foutris
Stephen Wilson
Sandrine Pelletier
Gast Bouschet & Nadine Hilbert

It starts with a point.
A single note abruptly struck, interrupting silence.
It is the something that has arisen out of nothing. An
individual note: sounding and then released.

A note strikes again, but is held longer.
It pushes through time, extending into space, stretching
vivaciously through the open air around it.

Before it can rest, a second note is struck;
its co-existence with the first forms a connection within
the spatial field. The two tones develop in conjunction,
resonating across the external plane, sometimes
harmonizing, sometimes deflecting. Together they
create a height and a width.

A third note is struck and the tones coil around us;
together they open a three-dimensional space, with
texture and depth. We enter into the composition,
experiencing the expression of its inner forces with all
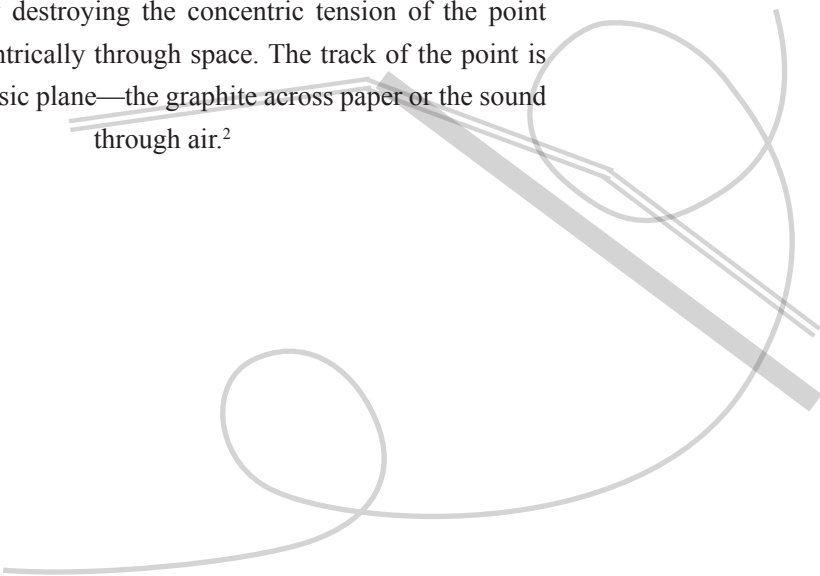of our senses.
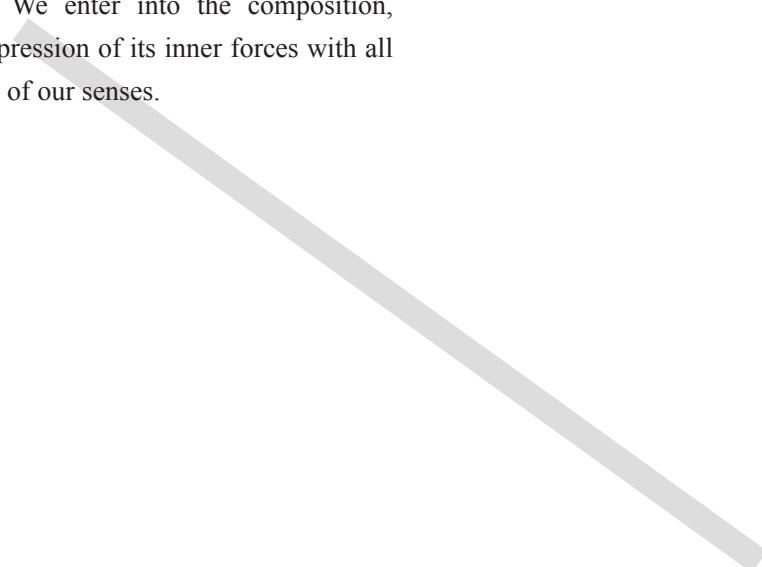
This visual portfolio, unfolding through the following pages, proposes a way to think through the experience of the eccentricities and disorientations of black metal's acoustics, by way of geometric spaces. To initiate this exploration, it is helpful to begin by referring to Wassily Kandinsky's fundamental book *Point and Line to Plane,* which provides graphic analyses of the elements of art. Kandinsky will not only guide us in our looking at geometric elements, but his interdisciplinary insistence of uncovering the "sounds" of art will show us how to hear these elements as well—emphasizing the visual and sonic cross-wires of this study.

The point is "the proto-element:" the smallest single unit, heard or seen in isolation. It is sharp, assertive, and brief. It has a size and shape. The point can be sound, or ink, or light. It is "a self-contained thing, full of possibilities." The note is struck, and the air is impacted. As the first collision into the basic plane, the point is felt as an "individual phenomenon," an event. It is the moment where form and expression break out of formlessness and potentiality.[1]

The second element is the line: the "greatest antithesis" to the point, made by forcefully destroying the concentric tension of the point and hurling it eccentrically through space. The track of the point is drawn across the basic plane—the graphite across paper or the sound through air.[2]

The first image in this portfolio, a drawing by Andrew McLeod, immediately references black-metal bands' logos. It is composed of white, mostly straight and vertical, lines on a vertical black plane. As opposed to horizontality (which emphasizes a cold foundation), the prominent verticality of this drawing expresses warmth and velocity.[3] Its defining characteristic is height rather than width. The majority of the lines in McLeod's drawing are simultaneously descending, towards the bottom of the page. (Yet, in a few cases there are deviations—lines also ascend upwards, or reach diagonally across, or curve.) The quantitative repetition of these vertical lines reaffirms their sound and intensifies their directional force. Stretching from the top third of the composition to the bottom third, the length of the lines conveys a concept of duration—the time in which the eye travels the line (a concept simultaneously used in graphic notations of music). Additionally, the lines' thin width conveys a high-pitched tone.[4] As the lines progress downwards, the assertive pressure of the graphite medium on the drawing surface gradually loosens or appears to fade, releasing the eye into darkness. Where two lines meet at a point, angles are formed. Nearly all of the angles we observe in McLeod's drawing are acute angles, or smaller than 90-degree (right) angles. As Kandinsky describes, acute angles are related more closely to the vertical and diagonal line than the horizontal. Their sound is thus sharp, highly active, aggressive, warm, and fast; they are translated as being of the "inner thought" or artistic "vision."[5]

We can also apply Kandinsky's analysis of line elements to the following photographs by Stephen Wilson, by describing the compositions as depicting structures of black lines set against a light-grey field. As in McLeod's drawing, a multiplicity of vertical lines persists in Wilson's two photographs. These lines are concentrated densely at the top of the plane, directing our eyes upwards. Whereas intuition tells us that gravity should attract heavier objects to the bottom of the plane, Wilson's photographs emphasize a sensation that the natural weight of the composition has been dislocated.[6] Indeed, this reorientation of weight seems to be (like the acute angles) a distinctive feature of this entire portfolio.

To be sure, the geometric analysis I am describing in this essay is not purely objective, logical, or ideal, but is rather bound up in the individual's intuition. An intuition developed not through *a priori* or self-evidential knowledge, but through practical and immediate spatial-temporal experiences that the senses have gained through living dynamically in this world. Kandinsky's descriptions of lines and weight reaffirm this concept, which Immanuel Kant describes in his essay "What does it mean to orient oneself in thinking?" and Edmund Husserl describes in "Clarification of the Origin of the Modern Opposition between Physicalistic Objectivism and Transcendental Subjectivism": geometry is not only an algebraic or theoretical science, it is the art of measuring the relationships between "things"; geometry is to be discovered phenomenologically, *with the body*.[7]

Yet, there is an underlying assumption within Kandinsky's geometric analysis (evident in his description of weight naturally resting at the bottom of a composition) that in order to think through a geometric experience, one ought to be uprightly postured. Erwin Straus describes it so: "The feet of the standing man are horizontally positioned, while his hands and arms hang down from the shoulders; the contractions of back and neck muscles are directed downwards."[8] Imagine how one is taught to contemplate artwork in galleries: stand upright and tall, politely face the art object directly, and survey from a distance. Straus continues: "vision perpendicular to one's

own body axis confronts things as they rise up vertically in a fronto-parallel plane."[9] This distinction insists that man's upright posture is not only key to his ability to *perceive* the living world, but essential for his ability to *comprehend* what he sees. It is this vertical posture and the distance it allows that distinguishes man from beast, for: "Sight the animal has in common with man, but in the upright posture seeing is transformed into beholding."[10] I have spent some time with this notion of the upright posture because the artworks in this portfolio simultaneously employ and challenge the orthodoxy of this orientation.

To return:

Wilson's photographs position the viewer within a geometric architectural space that can be understood through experiential intuition. The images describe a steel structure with transparent glass panes. This sort of space is common enough that the viewer can project their body within it, yet the perspective of the artist's camera offers a destabilization by depicting the distant expanses of the roof of the conservatory from underneath and within. We know that in order to achieve this viewpoint, one cannot simply look straight forward, but must stretch their neck up and back. In this gesture of vertical extension, the structure rises above us (countering gravity) and we thrust our gaze towards the glass panes to bridge the perceptual distance of heights and to enter the night sky glowing beyond.
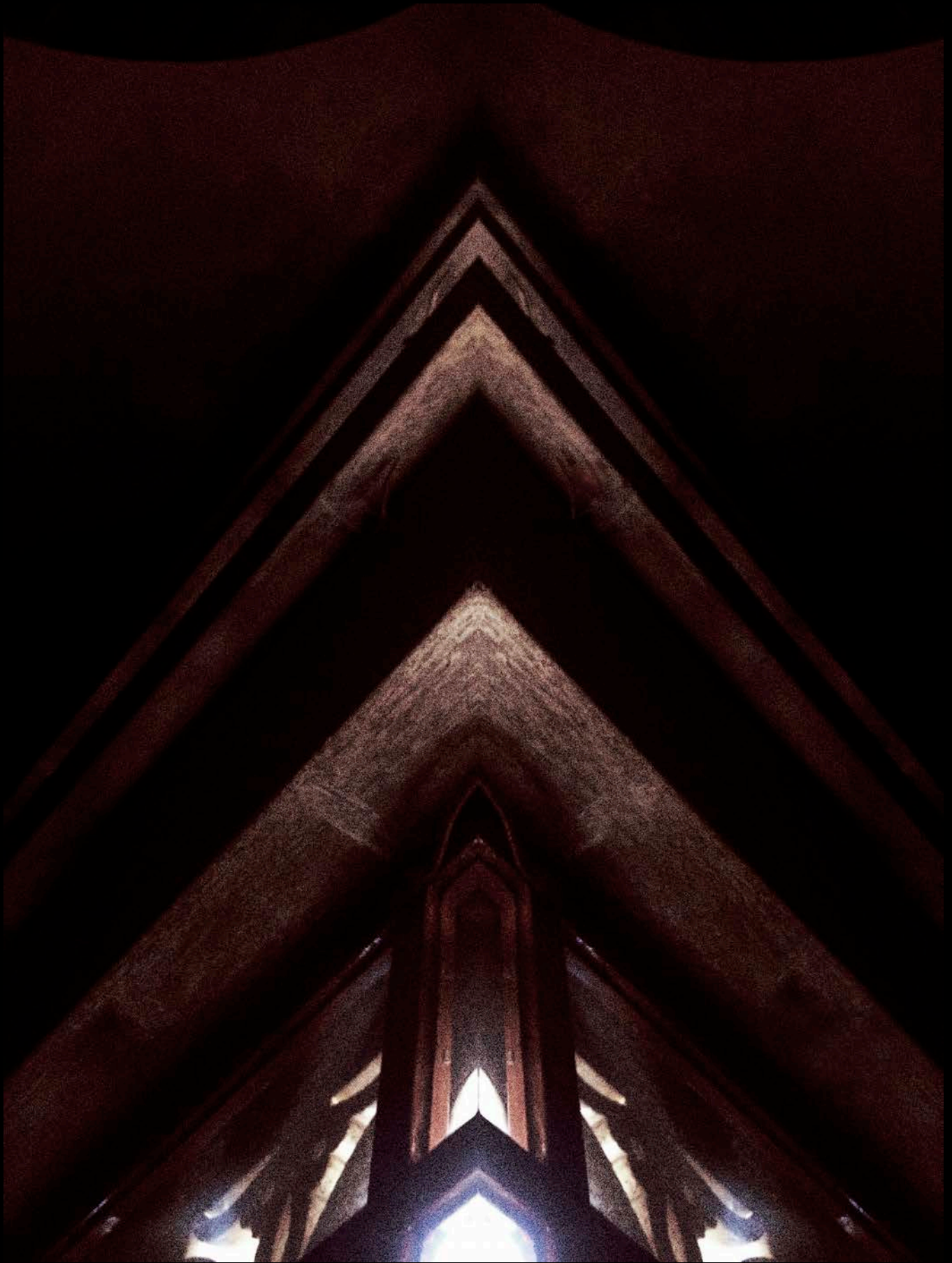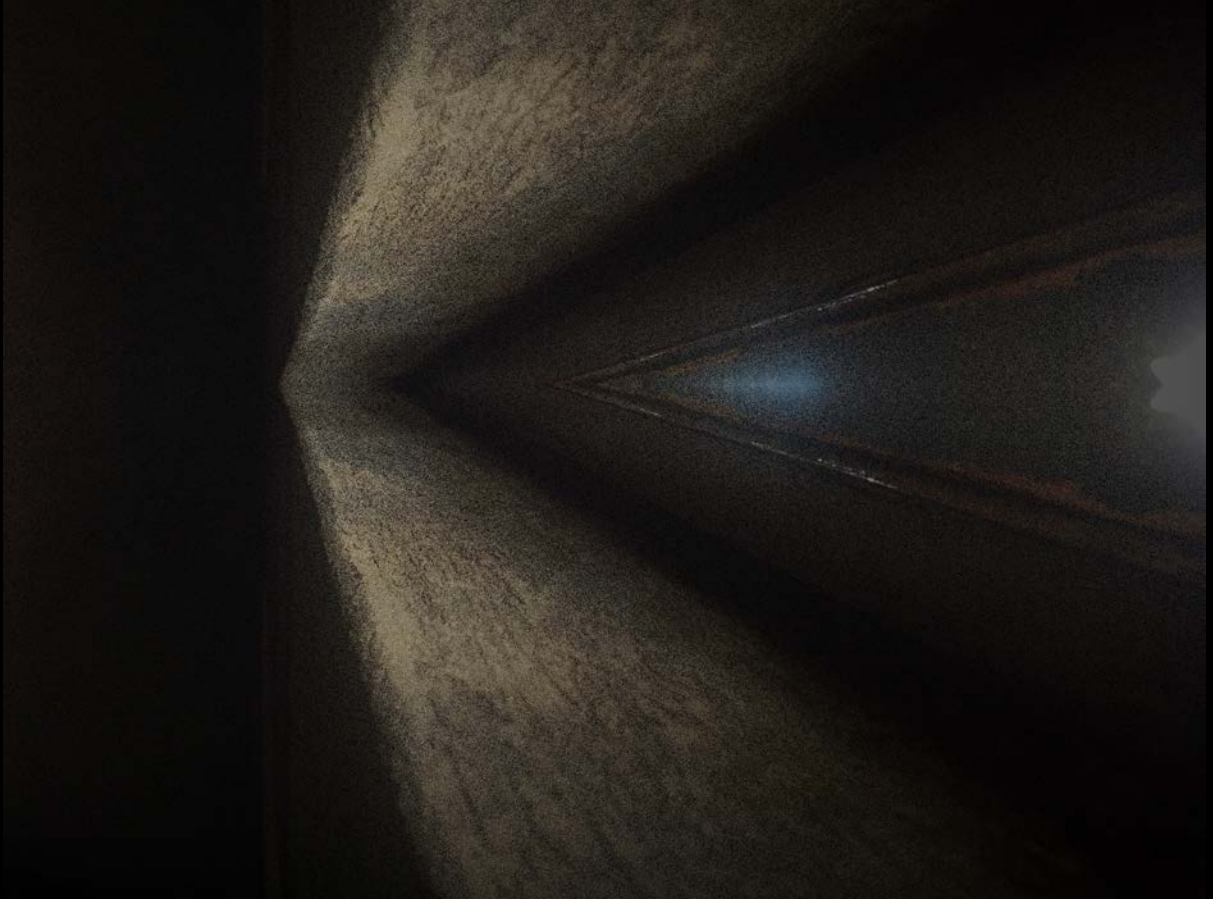
Dimitris Foutris's photographs depict a similar perspective, from a vantage point that looks up into the vast interior spaces of Byzantine churches. The building's structural lines are described with broad planes that rise above us on all sides, architecturally engineered to reflect light and sound. They invite the viewer's eyes to glide slowly along their expanses and linger within the vaulted ceilings. As the architect Peter Zumthor describes, they "define and separate an area of interior space from the space that surrounds them" and "contain a part of the infinite spatial continuum in a kind of open vessel …. Buildings that have a strong impact always convey an intense feeling of their spatial quality. They embrace the mysterious void called space in a special way and make it vibrate."[11]

There are infinities within these spiritual vessels and the massive interior spaces they contain. To look up into these spaces can inspire an impressive sensation of peering into the cosmos. However, there is a difference between beholding an image and beholding a sound. To behold an image usually means to stand outside of it, but to behold a sound is to be immersed within it.
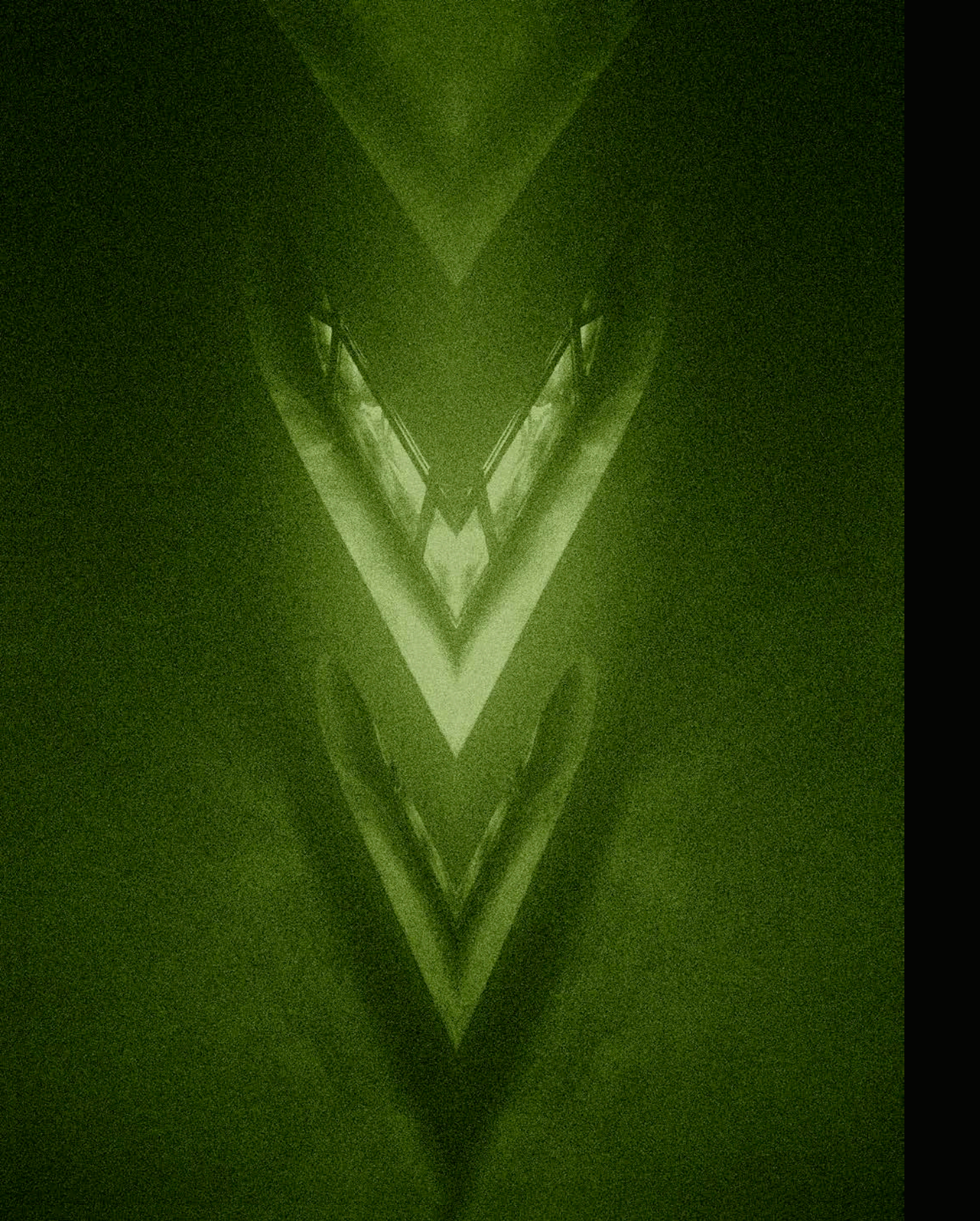
If we transgress this space, Foutris's photographs are no longer representations but rather invitations to project oneself into a visual experience, a journey that questions one's orientational possibilities. Walking under Foutris's architectural forms and looking directly forward does not offer us enough to enter these spaces. We must be flexible as we tilt the head up and arch *backwards*. We know this through bodily experience, and we can see it within the dance positions of *cambré* (lifting of the solar plexus, arching backwards from the waist, facing upwards) or more completely by *hinging* (bending at the knees, aligning the entire top of the body parallel with the sky). These physical motions teach us that, to transcend our upright posture, *the body must go down in order to go up*.

Balancing within this position, it is clear that there is something of the abyss here as well. As the black-metal band Darkspace explores: "Space is not simply 'out there'—we are in it and part of it. / We propose an experiment: Choose a dark and clear night. Lie down on your back. Look out for the stars. You will feel like looking "up" into the sky, but in Space there are no such things as 'up' or 'down.' You are adhered to the planet by gravitational force only. Visualize that situation and *look 'down' into the stars*. You might feel the fascinating fear to *lose planetary contact and soar into the void…*"[12]

By exploring geometric space, this portfolio proposes the ability to disrupt objective visual representations of space, and invites viewers to fall into the void, with head downwards.

Sandrine Pelletier's installation of a linear three-dimensional pentagram works towards this effect. As a sculptural object it is anamorphic; it changes its geometric form in relation to the viewer's position in space, requiring one to constantly displace or reorientate oneself by physically moving around the artwork and sharing the line's eccentric motions. To behold this form, the eye might concentrate its gaze at any point along the pentagram's path at will, and then hold onto the line's path as it bursts visually outward. The single continuous line extends and then stops, carves back (drawing an acute angle), transverses through the centrum, crosses over (or under) itself, and spikes into space, again, again, again. Your foot may step forward and then back, the head tilts, the spine twists. Such constant motion and reorientation makes it possible to momentarily lose one's bearings. Turning and overturning, it is possible to lose track of which way is up.


One inverts, and then inverts again.

If Pelletier's sculpture can be described as continually pushing its beholder outside of a clearly defined centric space, Gast Bouschet and Nadine Hilbert's photograph suggests the possibility that the beholder's experience can simulate sound: the perceiving body might become completely entwined, or caught up, within the geometric structure represented. *The tones coil around us; together they open a three-dimensional space, with texture and depth. We enter into the composition, experiencing the expression of its inner forces with all of our senses.* After all, orientation does not belong to the image, but rather to the relationship formed between the image and the body experiencing it. Lacking a visible anchorage, gravitational sensibilities can be rejected and, along with them, the sensation that there is a clear orientation to begin from. The eye might focus on one position, such as the linear pentacle in the lower-left, but it resolutely disperses outwardly, throughout the entire compositional field. Here, it seems that the viewer is suspended already *inside* of vertigo.

As this portfolio demonstrates, the possibility of perceptual inversion is not limited to a simple reversal of "up" and "down" but is an eccentricity and disorientation. It disrupts and dislodges. The orientational trajectory that I am proposing is one that begins upright, then looks up, arches over, curls back, inverts, and experiences a sensation of dislocating from gravity and *spiraling backwards into space*.

Notes:

1. Wassily Kandinsky, *Point and Line to Plane* (Dover Publications, 1979), 25–39.
2. Kandinsky, *Point and Line to Plane*, 54–57.
3. Kandinsky, *Point and Line to Plane*, 59.
4. Kandinsky, *Point and Line to Plane*, 98.
5. Kandinsky, *Point and Line to Plane*, 72.
6. Kandinsky, *Point and Line to Plane*, 117.
7. See Immanuel Kant's "What does it mean to orient oneself in thinking?" in *Immanuel Kant: Religion and Rational Theology*, edited and translated by Allen W. Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 7–18, and Edmund Husserl's "Clarification of the Origin of the Modern Opposition between Physicalistic Objectivism and Transcendental Subjectivism" in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, translated by David Carr (Northwestern University Press, 1970), 20–100.
8. E. W. Straus, "Born to See, Bound to Behold: Reflections on the Function of Upright Posture in the Esthetic Attitude," *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 27.4 (December 1965), 664.
9. Straus, "Born to See, Bound to Behold," 682.
10. Straus, "Born to See, Bound to Behold, 665.
11. Peter Zumthor, "Composing in space" in *Thinking Architecture*, translated by Maureen Oberli-Turner (Lars Müller Publishers, 1999), 21.
12. "Interview with Darkspace," *Mortem Zine,* May 2009, http://www.mortemzine.net/show.php?id=1539 [Emphasis added.] (Thank you Ben Woodard for drawing our attention to this interview.)
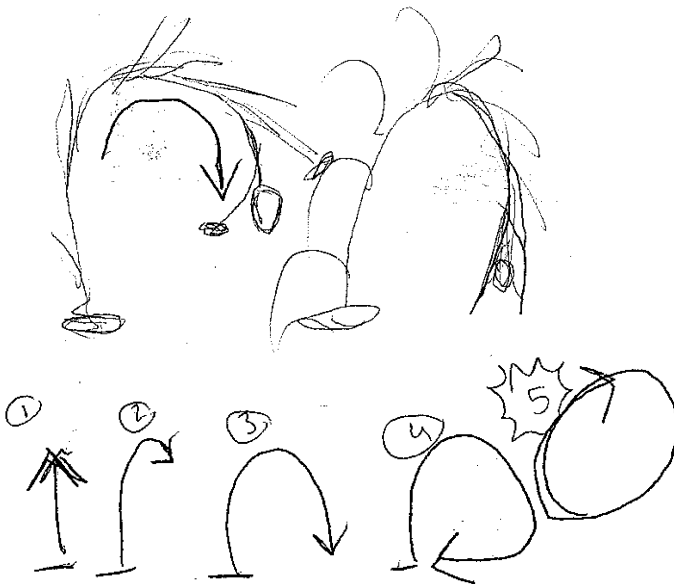
Images:

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Andrew McLeod
Untitled, 2010
graphite on paper digitally reversed, A4
courtesy of Ivan Anthony Gallery

Pages 7-9
Stephen Wilson
Structures - II, 2013
photograpy, 13.5 x 18 in
Structures - IV, 2013
photography, 18 x 13.5 in

Pages 10-12
Dimitris Foutris
The Leader Of The Dark Chariot Is Afraid Of
The Velvet Light 01, 2012
digital print on fine art paper, 80 x 107 cm
The Society Of Eternal Greens, 2012
digital print on fine art paper, 80 x 107 cm
The Path Towards The Horizon, 2012
digital print on fine art paper, 80 x 107 cm
images are courtesy of artist and Ileana Tounta Gallery

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Sandrine Pelletier
Aeg Yesoodth Ryobi Ele_emDrill!, 2011
wood, ashes, 380 x 380 x 380 cm
courtesy of artist and Roberto Greco

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Gast Bouschet & Nadine Hilbert
Incantation of the Gates, London, 2011
photography

GIVING LIFE HARMONIOUSLY
Animal Inversion in Cattle Decapitation

Erik van Ooijen

Images of meat, violence, and ecological disaster shape the thematic core of the music of Cattle Decapitation, a San Diego deathgrind band formed in 1996. As is common for the genre, the lyrics, written by singer Travis Ryan, seem steeped in pig blood and human feces, and covered by the dust of demolished civilizations. These motifs are extended visually to the artwork of album covers, t-shirts, and music videos, forming a thematic network of corresponding images. A recurring motif is particularly prominent, setting the band apart: it is the inversion of power between man and animal (or, more specifically, man and livestock). Related are further reversals, where death becomes life and life becomes death, and where evolutionary and civilizational progress is turned into a decaying loop, the eternal return of samsaric disaster.

As a critical concept, inversion is usually traced back to a passage from Friedrich Engels, famously quoted and commented upon, for example, by Frantz Fanon. Says Engels, apropos the main characters of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719):

> If Crusoe could procure a sword for himself, we are equally entitled to assume that one fine morning Friday might appear with a loaded revolver in his hand, and then the whole "force" relationship is inverted. Friday commands, and it is Crusoe who has to drudge.[1]

In art criticism, Engel's notion of inversion has been related to what is termed "World Upside Down" broadsheets, i.e., a particular genre of pictures emerging in

the sixteenth century depicting the reversal of relations associated with proverbial dichotomies. As explained by David Kunzle, these broadsheets

> are based upon the principal of hierarchical inversion (wife takes male role, children punish parents, servant commands master, animal kills hunter, prey hunts predator, etc.). . . . The natural and social impossibilities represented in the World Upside Down broadsheets are no longer used as discrete rhetorical and metaphorical figures, . . . but for their own sakes, and as constituents of a complete world that could, at any time of social stress, be taken to represent an existing, or threatening, or desired reality. Unless the broadsheets illustrate simply a kind of verbal nonsense, they posit social revolution.[2]

Such motifs point out a hierarchical relationship by acknowledging how each marked opposition relies on the possibility of its own reversal. In a carnivalesque manner, they depict social upheaval in a comic mode, suggesting the possibility of a new order which may at first seem absurd, yet, at second thought, shockingly feasible. Often, the focus lies on class relations: the peasant riding while the king is walking, the servant arresting the master, and so on.[3] In other instances, they also invert the relationship between animal and man, or prey and predator: Birds eat man, ass drives master, sheep eats wolf, etc. Sometimes, animal rises up against man with a vengeance: when ox flays butcher, pig guts butcher, or parrot teaches caged man to talk. It is in these latter images we approach the thematic realm of Cattle Decapitation.
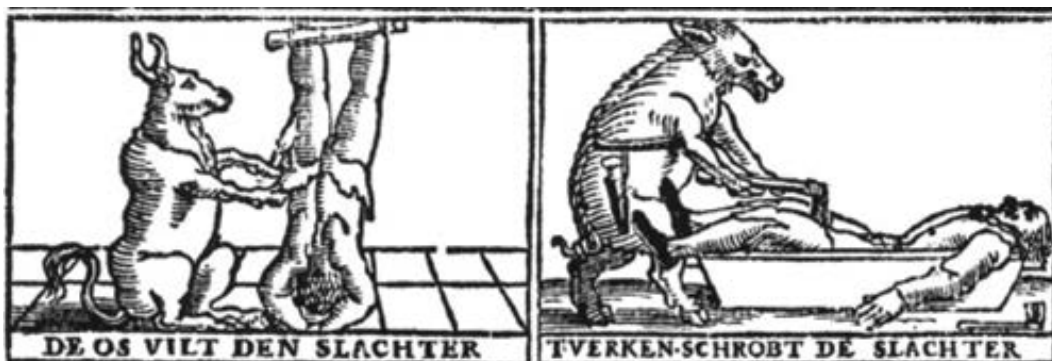

Figure 1. Ox flays butcher, pig guts butcher. Detail from a Dutch late-sixteenth-century woodcut. (After Kunzle, p. 200.)

According to James C. Scott, man / animal inversion motifs may seem less obvious than the simple reversal of master / slave dichotomies. For Scott, pictures of two geese turning a human on a spit over a fire seem less meaningful, bordering, even, on the purely absurdist comedy of conceptual incongruity. In this view, such images will only become subversive through the act of allegorical interpretation: the fox is the law feeding upon the geese symbolizing the economically poor, and so on.[4] However, such an interpretation only implies how the very notion of an animal ethics or politics seems absurd to the interpreter. In Cattle Decapitation, on the other hand, it is precisely the dichotomy between animal and man that must be overthrown, since it forms a hierarchy even more violent than that between ruling and working classes.

Figure 2. *Ten Torments of the Damned* (1997).

Consider the notoriously gruesome artwork of their album covers. The self-released debut *Ten Torments of the Damned* (1997) presents a direct allusion to the tradition of ox-flaying-butcher motifs in the World Upside Down broadsheets, showing a man with the head of a cow about to behead a cow with a human face. The image suggests how the band's name refers not only to the human act of slaughtering animals, but also to animals rising up in order to become decapitators: Through a playful use of double entendre, it includes its own inversion. More bluntly, the song "Long-Pig Chef and the Hairless Goat" (2002) speaks of "an orgasmic decapitation of human cattle."[5]

The moniker is not chosen for pure shock value. Whereas it fits within the violent framework of the grindcore tradition, it further disturbs this framework by unsettling the structural hierarchies inherent to the genre. The butchering,

slaughtering, and turning of humans into pieces of meat is a common motif in deathgrind lyrics. Here, it is taken a step further, as the violence of the genre starts to dismantle its own ideological hierarchies. Through animal inversion, a queer position of the other is initiated, upsetting the misogynistic power of death metal and grindcore, as well as the anthropocentric tradition of a humanist morality presumably outraged by the genre.

As pointed out by Rosemary Overell, grindcore brutality often relies on a masculine / feminine murder / victim relationship.[6] A compulsively common motif depicts the male serial killer and rapist in the act of what may be called, with reference to a Dutch death metal band, "Prostitute Disfigurement." In this respect, deathgrind and grindcore, while seemingly transgressive, correspond with contemporary meat culture at large: The eating and killing of animals is rendered masculine, misogynistic brutality against women is conceptualized in terms of animalization, and women are reduced and reified as pure "pieces of meat."[7] Keith Thomas has stressed how the Western ethic of human domination served not only to remove animals from "the sphere of human concern" but also to legitimize violence against all people considered less human.[8] In this view, meat culture rests on the same conceptual and ideological foundation as rape culture, racism, slavery, and so on.[9] Along similar lines, Jacques Derrida famously settled for adding the prefix *carno-* to his notion of "West's phallic 'logocentrism,'"[10] in order to emphasize how, in a culture dominated by and reproduced through sacrificial rites, women are made subordinate to men and nonhuman animals to both.[11] Against erect man, the freestanding subject, woman has been defined as lacking the presence of the phallus, just as animal, in turn, is understood in terms of a lack of language, reason, consciousness, reflection, ipseity, and the power to name the other (animal).[12] For Derrida, it is by eating the other, thus turning the other into an object for consumption, that man "creates the inner space that is the subject."[13] Accordingly, it is not just that the animal is rendered lawless, situated on the outside of judiciality, but rather that the law itself constitutes a sacrificial structure reliant on the possibility for "a noncriminal putting to death."[14] Against this "carnophallogocentric" backdrop, instances of deathmetal and grindcore and its subgenres (deathgrind, goregrind, pornogrind, etc.) could be considered to harbor a potential for upsetting humanist morality, due not only to the shocking explicitness of the genres, but their ability to disenchant the violent reification through which animals, women, and so on, are rendered into meat. Like many horror and ultraviolent movies, deathgrind makes explicit how the apotheosis of dominant masculine sexuality is expressed in the raping, dismembering, cooking, and eating of feminized, animalized flesh. But the music may launch a further attack against

political power by also making explicit the fact that, as Derrida wittily stresses, the "*chef* must be an eater of flesh."[15] As Derrida puts it: "in our countries, who would stand a chance of becoming a *chef d'Etat* (a head of State), and of thereby acceding 'to the head,' by publicly, and therefore exemplarily, declaring him- or herself to be a vegetarian?"[16] To be a subject, to master a subject, to speak with authority on a subject in the name of the subject, one must do so with masculine virility, as one who "accepts sacrifice and eats flesh."[17] Consequently, as pointed out by Derek Attridge, Derrida may himself talk "animatedly about carnophallogocentrism while eating with gusto a plate of steak tartare."[18]

Cattle Decapitation is less interested in the role of the eater than in that of the eaten as they set out to stand the sacrificial structure on its head by channeling the violent potentialities of deathgrind in a direction that no longer risks merely cementing the conceptual foundation of humanist morality but aims at demolishing it. In a kind of ferocious *meaterialism*, all become meat, and flesh and soil the prominent stuff of the world. Grindcore's patriarchal order is replaced by a chaotic violence where everything and all relations must be dissected, switched around and reassembled in new and eerie combinations. The rather *queer* result is not a politics of rainbow solidarity but the vengeful act of "forced gender reassignment," the brutal transformation of the male homophobic bigot into what he most despises: "A slice up the shaft and around the corona / Unsheathed penile muscle exposing the urethra / Welcome to forced gender dysphoria / How does it feel to be a woman now and not a man?"[19] Oppositions are not dismantled but turned around, and the opponent's position is mercilessly reaffirmed. As a result, inversion comes to oscillate between a disgust *and* a desire for violence, as it becomes clear that the only way to end man's dominance may be to end man himself.

The video for the song "Forced Gender Reassignment," directed by Mitch Massie, has caused online controversy and was banned from both YouTube and Vimeo. Whereas many comments have concerned its mere visual gruesomeness, some have touched upon whether the gory depictions should be viewed as politically meaningful or mere speculation in gratuitous violence. The video details how religious anti-gay protesters get kidnapped and are forced to undergo a brutal "sex change" where the genitals of a man and a woman are cut off or sewn closed and then reattached, once more, to the partner of the opposite sex. In motivating the depiction, the band makes explicit references to the theme of inversion. An official press release describes the video as "a gory, obscenely graphic and explicitly intense story of what could happen when the tables are turned on a group of people whose faith blinds them to the point of being unable to mind their own business and just letting others be themselves."[20] Furthermore, Ryan states that "the song is

about taking certain religious sects and showing them what it's like to be in another person's shoes—someone whose life is simply different than theirs."[21]

Unsurprisingly, the video has been denounced as a trite revenge story, obscuring any potential political message by its blunt outrageousness. As one concerned commenter states, "what they do in the video is not a proportional response to these people."[22] Similar opinions are echoed even in positive reviews, which may declare that the video "isn't really about transfolk," but "hatred, pure and simple":

> There's never any sense of reason or poetic justice to the events: the homophobes are clearly shitty people, but do they really deserve what comes to them? There's a fairly large divide between writing songs about butchering slaughterhouse workers for their crimes against animals and cold-blooded torture of some morally dubious protestors.[23]

But doesn't this miss the extent to which the simple fantasy of turned tables is accompanied by a corresponding shift towards the experiential position of the other's "shoes"? In addition to the base justness of an eye-for-an-eye ideology, we are presented with an artistic rendition of the absolute distance towards the otherness of the other, of what extreme means are necessary for the crudest approximation of the "transfolk" experience, that is, of being alienated towards one's own body, an uncanny corporeality consisting to an essential degree of organs of the "wrong" sex, utterly alien in themselves. Along with the visceral explication of symbolic violence, we are presented with a hint at the embodied painfulness of gender dysphoria as such. This alone suggests a message worth teasing out and taking seriously.

Obviously, Cattle Decapitation is far from suggesting a hippie politics of getting along. Rather, they charge an attack against the brutality haunting the very pathos of humanism. Unlike The Smiths, they are not content with the sentimental indignation caused by images of cute creatures having to die for no reason. According to the structure of inversion, meat is not only murder (as in the title of The Smiths' famous animal rights anthem), but must rise up to murder. The point is not that "heifer whines could be human cries," as Morissey has it, but rather that the heifer will *cause* human cries, as the ox and the butcher switch places.[24] Or, as it is put in the punningly titled "To Serve Man":[25]

> Men, women and children shall be strung
> Sliced from hands to feet
> Innards save for a tasty treat

and beaten profusely to tenderize the meat
. . .
Millions of humans hung upon hooks
Suspended in deep freeze
Subzero, sterile environment
keeps meat tender and lean
Choice cuts from slaughter—
Husband, mother, daughter
Dead families kept together
Their hides made into leather
Surprisingly multiple uses for something so useless[26]

Inversion does not simply entail a dismantling of dichotomies resulting in a flat uniformity of non-friction. Writing on suicide, Hume famously declared that "the life of a man is of no greater importance to the universe than that of an oyster."[27] That is, from the detached "standpoint of the Absolute" (Slavoj Žižek),[28] everything is equal in being equally gratuitous. As ethics dislocates the humanist center, a tension arises between total Gaia and multiple singularities, a tension well summarized in Derrida's notion of "an immense multiplicity of other living things that cannot in any way be homogenized, except by means of violence."[29] In Cattle Decapitation, animal inversion takes place on both levels, as a disruption of the cosmic order, when the godlike regulation of the universal cycle of death and rebirth is put in the hoofs of bovine deities, as well as of the local order, when castrated ox flays butcher and hangs him on the hooks of the factory farm. On the one hand, all perspectives are negated; on the other hand, all perspectives are affirmed. Thus, we see man from the alien point of view of the other, that is, Hume's oyster, or, better yet, the shark: "These things you call humans but we call it lunch."[30] For the dark mirror of Hume's argument is, of course, one raised by Sade: it is only according to the violent hierarchies of anthropocentrism that we may assert "that there was no wrong in butchering a pig for food, while there was nothing worse than performing the same operation upon a human being."[31] If the life of man is equal to that of an oyster, the eating of man is equally justified.

However, in Cattle Decapitation, violence against man is not fuelled by nihilism but rather by the foreboding suspicion that only the killing of man may end human tyranny. As the ox and the butcher are turned upside down, we are forced to remove ourselves from the position of center, but before we can even imagine a standpoint of total Gaia or the myriad standpoints of multiplicities, we, as humans, must acknowledge our own monstrosity as seen from the subaltern point of view.

If the resulting position is anti-humanist, it is so because it derives from the fury and desperation of the oppressed trying to free themselves from a very real and particular set of social relations, the entanglement of the ones snared by leashes and chains, confined to feed lots and gestation crates, dangling from meat hooks, still conscious while their throats are being slit. As often pointed out by decon-structivist theorists, such a shift of perspective will not *undo* the lopsided opposition. On the other hand, it gets its dialectical energy precisely from *main-taining* the opposition through reversal, by switching the locus of power from one end to the other. In this sense, the turning upside down of the world will for Cattle Decapitation result in a position that may very well be termed "animal suprema-cist."[32] In place of postmodern inertia, the opposition is worked by establishing a new point of dominance seeking aggressively to annihilate the current one. The result is a kind of samsaric circle, that is, the repeating cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, or production, disaster, and creativity, in several Eastern religions, or, in brief, an ethics of eternal return: "Brutality in ouroborous."[33] The flattening of rela-tions does not precede violence, as in the leveled universe of equal men and oysters, but must be forever shifted and reproduced through the operations of vio-lent cyclic processes. As such, it depends upon the production of new and always already dismantling hierarchies of power.
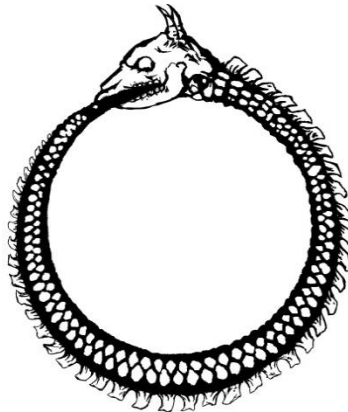

Figure 3. Brutality in ouroborous; one of Cattle Decapitation's logos.

Through animal inversion, post-humanism becomes post-apocalyptical: it is the violent upheaval of a dominant civilization in its entirety. However, since existence as such prevails without humans, it is apocalyptical only when seen from the very humanist perspective that is now rendered obsolete. As stressed by Elizabeth

Grosz, the human, like all life forms, is destined to be overcome, "a momentary blip in a history and cosmology that remains fundamentally indifferent to this temporary eruption."[34] Cattle Decapitation imagines a time when the study of man can only be carried out as "scatanthropology," the exploration not of human nature, but of "humanure,"[35] remains preserved in coprolite, "thousands of years of bipedal mammalian hierarchy" now "fossilized in feces."[36] This echoes several arguments made recently by post-humanist and feminist neo-materialists. For example, Jane Bennett follows Darwin in pointing out how worms help preserve human civilizations for future archeological excavations by covering in their castings our residual artifacts.[37] But like Grosz, Cattle Decapitation moves a step further by seeking not only to inscribe animal agency in human history, but to imagine a natural history or evolution beyond the very limits that humanity comprises. Here, all of man is buried in his own castings, and thus preserved for the coming age of the mutant maggot. In the scatanthropological era, ethics will be as inevitably post-humanist as humanist ethics is post-dinosaurian, caring, at best, for bones and bezoar stones: Only disaster can bring radical change to us "fellow future fossils."[38] In samsara, the detached universal and the situated subaltern perspectives combine to form an ethics of "extermination and re-genesis":[39] "Decomposition—a morbid demonstration / The cycle of life—in all its majesty."[40]

Thus, a second inversion turns upside down the relationship between life and death: life is no longer that which must be nourished in order to prevail, but that which must be destroyed in order to nurture the new. We become earth and food for generations of alien others. In the age of man, a multitude of species were butchered in order to feed a single one; in the age of the maggot, a single species is butchered to feed the many. The motifs are combined on the cover to *Humanure*, where a cow defecates a gory mass of human remains. Or, to put it in the immortal words of Slipknot: "People = Shit."[41]

By destroying his own kind, the sadistic and cannibalistic serial killer emerges as an agent of change, more radical than any meat-eating socialist, more virtuous than any meat-eating humanist. By the relentless killing of animals, man negates his own justification. In genocide, on the other hand, he acts as a tool for his absolute other, the just karmic divinanimals who themselves are brutal butchers with bovine heads and hoofs. Perhaps, these deities may be likened to Eduard von Hartmann's "*Unbewussten*," the drive towards total extinction operating as the propelling force behind all living creatures. In Hartmann's view, man is created for the very reason of achieving total annihilation in order to end all suffering, and thus he works to extinguish all life, including his own.[42] The serial killer is simply "picking clean"[43] a species with a perverted delight responding to what Pierre

Klossowski, apropos Sade, terms "the categorical imperative of a cosmic tribunal that demands the annihilation of all that is human."[44] When asked why, the mass murderer may simply answer: "Because you are human . . ."[45]

Figure 4. *Humanure* (2004).

Figure 5. *Karma.Bloody.Karma* (2006).

In Sade, murder is not a crime against Nature but the murderer her instrument, "since she is a great murderess herself and since her single reason for murdering is to obtain, from the wholesale annihilation of cast creatures, the chance to recast them anew."[46] Consequently, the most "wicked individual on earth, the most

abominable, the most ferocious, the most barbarous, and the most indefatigable murderer is therefore but the spokesman of her desires, the vehicle of her will, and the surest agent of her caprices."[47] Klossowski interprets Sade's philosophy as a death drive ontology refusing to treat death as a return to an inanimate inorganic state. Rather, death is teeming with life, and is what allows for an individual to transcend conatus and open up for a vital production exceeding the homogenous specimen, the species, and even the kingdom: In decaying, dead matter "proves that it is not inert; it enriches the soil, fertilizes it, and serves in the regeneration of the other kingdoms as well as of its own."[48] In this sense, Sade approaches a kind of dark materialism pending between the Bergsonian virtuality of prebiotic soup[49] or "a quivering protoblob of creative élan"[50] and Derrida's notion of life as a multiplicity of relations between multiple forms of the living and the dead.[51]

Sade and Cattle Decapitation both affirm the full extent of the violence inherent to a cyclic model of life. Man is reduced to a paste and putty from which new species are molded.[52] The cycle of life is a cycle of shit. Man is born from and gives birth to shit, turning the act of procreation into one of defecation.[53] He dies from cancers, polyps, and the "gastrointestinal nightmares"[54] caused by years of digesting "fetid flesh"[55] and feces packaged as food.[56] This is no hyperbole. Today, when people die of "Hamburger Disease," they do so from bacteria brought into the food by the mixing of feces and meat during production. In our everyday food factories, putrid meat brimming with maggots is turned into baby food, and chicken meat has been allowed to soak up feces-filled water, or what the industry secretly terms "fecal soup." In contemporary meat culture, customers literally spend their dollars on chicken shit. For, as is made clear by a USDA meat inspector: "We used to trim the shit off the meat. Then we washed the shit off the meat. Now the consumer eats the shit off the meat."[57] In Cattle Decapitation, man, having died from consuming shit and rancid animal, may rot away in order to birth new animals. Finally dead, he becomes the breeding ground for a multiplicity of new creatures: fleas and flies;[58] maggots and mites;[59] planaria and protists, and other "secondary human byproducts."[60] As it is stated in "A Body Farm": "For every life I take, an ecosystem I create."[61]

Slavoj Žižek has famously commented upon the song "Circle of Life" from Disney's animated movie *The Lion King* (1994), noting that its appraisal of samsara "of course" is sung by the lions: "life is a great circle, we eat the zebras, the zebras eat grass; but then, after we die and return to the earth, we also feed the grass, and the circle is closed—this is the best message imaginable for those at the top."[62] What is needed from political critique, according to Žižek, is a will, not just to switch one's position—a "bottom feeder working its way to the top"[63]—but to change the circle

itself. In Cattle Decapitation, on the other hand, singing man decenters his own position. In the (literally) post-human scatanthropological perspective, Žižek's position seems too closely tied to the anthropocentric view of man as a privileged agent working within the delimited framework of civilized society. The limitations of such a position become apparent when considering Žižek's fictional counter-example, a version of the song imagined to be sung by the Jewish father in Roberto Benigni's *La vita è bella* (1997):

> The Nazis are killing us here in Auschwitz, but you should see, my son, how all this is part of a larger Circle of Life: the Nazis themselves will die and turn into fertilizer for the grass, which will be eaten by the cows; the cows will be slaughtered and we will eat their meat in our pies.[64]

The rhetorical force of such an example relies on its humanist pathos. Although sarcastically expressing a revulsion against the brutality of the Nazi Holocaust, it fails to acknowledge the concentration-camp-like violence inherent to humanism itself (even spelled out by Derrida[65]): In Žižek's notoriously anti-vegetarian politics, where the individual abstaining from meat eating is immediately rendered less human, more animal,[66] cows are unthinkable as anything else than protein pie filling for human consumption. From the bovine standpoint of the shackled cow, on the other hoof, the kosher Jew is an equal threat, and *shechita* slaughter is just another form of slaughter. Thus, animal inversion suggests a shift reaching beyond radical humanist politics.

According to Joanna Demers, it is easy while reading post-apocalyptic fiction to fall prey to the notion that "a post-human world would be a more beautiful and peaceful place," and thus to start believing in "a possibility that in reality affords no possibilities at all."[67] From the radically scatanthropological perspective, on the other hand, the emergence of new forests from the industrial ruins of a human civilization is full of possibilities and nothing but possibility, a possibility made possible precisely by turning the human world upside down by disaster. Through human apocalypse, new vital ecologies spring forth, "the cadaver now giving life harmoniously."[68] Hereby, evolution becomes de-evolution,[69] an eternal return of mutants and monsters, filtered "through genetic anomaly."[70] Civilizational advance brings technologized bestiality, and man is a mere mistake, a gestational mutation evolved from feces.[71] The emergence of intelligence is a budding disaster in itself, calling for a melancholic nostalgia of dark evolutionary origins: "Had we stayed lichens, had intellect not have been . . . a paradise this would be."[72] Yet, although technological progress is presented as an intensification of human dominance and

degeneration, there is little patience for primitivist luddism: as indicated by the artwork for *Monolith of Inhumanity* (2012), with its obvious allusions to Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), beginning and end are equally barbarian moments in human history.

Figure 6. *Monolith of Inhumanity* (2012).

Through its destructive force, technology itself harbors a potential for obliterating violence by means of violence. With reference to Divine Heresy, we could say that the first femur club and the slowly degrading rubber tire are both equal manifestations of human artifacts as "Monolithic Doomsday Devices."[73] Whereas Hartmann found it unfeasible for nineteenth-century man to fulfill his self-destructing purpose, the philosopher nevertheless imagined a future where mankind had gathered the practical technological means to be able to choose to cease to exist.[74] Working in Hartmann's tradition, Ulrich Horstmann argues for an apocalyptic and "anthropofugal" philosophy of "*Menschenflucht*," a state of existential peace achieved through the human escape from the world. Like Cattle Decapitation, Horstmann finds in human history little more than an expansive slaughterhouse, a "continuous litany of chopping, stabbing, skewering, hacking, the monotony of slaughtering and smashing skulls."[75] Paradise is not found in pre-civilizational innocence but in the final expelling of man: "The true Garden of Eden—is desolation."[76] But unlike Hartmann, Horstmann finds such an

annihilation to be within actual reach for modern man due to the development of advanced nuclear, biological, and chemical technology.[77] In Cattle Decapitation, similar themes are succinctly presented in a song like "Everyone Deserves to Die":

> Adoration for man's expiration
>
> Pain . . .
> Disease . . .
> Ignorance . . .
> Extinction of man
> And peace on earth
> . . .
> Extreme holocaust of the peoples
> The unbiased hand of death
> Resetting an evolution
> Reversed big-bang conclusion
> You are the disease
> Your existence is cancer
> Ecological tumor
> A disgrace to the earth
> Deserving of pain
> Deserving of euthanasia
> . . .
> Visualize nonexistence[78]

In other words, the band seems to be joining the German pessimists in viewing the "self-destructing human parasite"[79] as primarily a "self-propelled death machine" heading towards "voluntary human extinction."[80]

Is committing suicide, then, the only viable ethical option? We must remember that in Cattle Decapitation, whose works still are artistic rather that philosophical, thematic imagery is presented precisely as a *theme*, that is, as meaning rather than performative action. Unlike Philipp Mainländer, Ryan does not stack up his published works in order to form a platform from which he may hang himself. Rather, the band performs music communicating in a present political situation. From the standpoint of the Absolute, they are fatalists: the samsaric cycle of eternal disaster is inevitable. Yet, the music as message is still performed by, and directed at, what Žižek terms "a finite agent engaged in terrestrial struggle."[81] As an artistic theme, radical anti-humanism may still commune what Levi R. Bryant terms "an ontology

where humans are no longer monarchs of being but are instead *among* beings, *entangled* in beings, and *implicated* in other beings,"[82] or what Grosz describes as a "perspectivalism that is always relative to the perceiving, moving, acting body and its particular morphology . . . and the ways in which each species, from the humblest to the most complex, orients its world according to its interests, capacities, knowledges, and uses."[83] Cattle Decapitation lets us approach, by means thematic and artistic, a critical point where post-humanism starts feeling uncomfortable even for an avid advocate of ontological flatness like Bennett. For the latter, the notion of a flat ecosystem must be carefully distinguished from that of a democratically (and basically humanist) ordered public society; there is, simply, no possibility of a polity "so egalitarian that important human needs, such as health or survival, would not take priority."[84] At this point Bennett, following Jacques Rancière, but in contrast to Grosz, seems to abandon an ontology of difference for one of affinities where the human apparently is re-inscribed in an ethical and political center surrounded by the traditional abyss of language: as she bluntly puts it, "my conatus will not let me 'horizontalize' the world completely."[85] Neither Bryant nor Grosz are interested in the absolute equality of detached Totality, yet, their models may still allow for an endless number of perspectival shifts, including the violent, blood-thirsty, tyrannous inversion of the slave procuring a gun or the ox flaying the butcher. In contrast, Bennett's model risks relapsing into a traditional notion of a gradually "expanding circle" where "more nonhumans" simply are acknowledged in "more ways" by a fixed, sovereign center.[86]

What, then, is the political message of Cattle Decapitation? At first, it seems close to unintelligible, delivered, as it is, in Ryan's peculiar style of growling and shrieking. This may seem fit for the motif of animal inversion, as expressing the becoming-animal of the human voice or the animal disruption of the very linguistic order it is so often denied. Overell associates the grindcore voice with a devolving of speech into Lacanian *lalanguage*, "the pre-symbolic and pre-gendered babbling of the infant."[87] In the Lacanian tradition, Julia Kristeva has described the communicative order in terms of a symbolic regularity based on fluctuating, ephemeral, and corporeal forms of the body's pre-linguistic semiosis. In this view, the pure meaning of ordered speech is always already possibly disordered by the corporeality of the speech organs, every message thus working against its own visceral grain. Yet, Ryan must be seen as moving beyond Lacan, and, in the manner of Derrida, as inquiring critically the abyss separating animal from man, by replacing the dominance of the Master Signifier with a multiplicity of modes where the ability to form communicative traces stems from materiality itself. Similarities are found in Grosz' attempt at understanding language according to a model of

uncentered vitality. In her view, all kinds and stages of linguistic elaboration, "from the glorious rhythmic dancing of bees to the pheromonal impulses of ants," exist not as undeveloped stages culminating in the human tongue, but side by side, paratactically rather than hierarchically.[88] For Grosz, language is but one path emanating from the affective possibilities of certain organs making possible certain sounds, and, in the extension, song, vocalization, musical cadence, and so on.

When comparing the music of Cattle Decapitation with the Kristevan model, things seem to be the other way around: the growling of animal semiosis is rather disrupted by pressing meaningfulness, a descent or a devolution, not into noise, but into meaning. By situating the grindcore growl in a signifying communicative context of album cover artwork, music videos, t-shirt prints, official websites, interviews and printed lyrics accompanying each album, the corporeal force of the seemingly un-articulated music directs the listener towards an ethical and political imperative of stressing relevance for their daily interactions with the world. Hereby, a final inversion, between sound and meaning, will also come to stand the very brutality of deathgrind on its head, as revelry in gratuitous images of extreme violence pale in comparison to the prevalent gruesomeness of our apparently peaceful everyday meat culture. Cattle Decapitation demonstrates how the "scandalous" and seemingly extreme images of deathgrind violence in fact form the ideological foundation as well as material practices of humanity's mystified and reified violent interactions with its significant others. Through channeling the potentialities of violence, noise, and disruption, Cattle Decapitation lets the deathgrind message become, almost against its own will, one of refusing, not producing, violence. In lieu of a conclusion, we may, indeed, behold the gruesome "Chunk Blower":

A gigantic grinder
Fused of steel and turbine
Blades flay muscle from bone
Nobody dies alone
As hundreds wait for death
The sound of engines grinding
Every tissue, organ and lining
explode in a mulch of compost
Churning corkscrews of pain
Razor-sharp gears and cogs
For the creation of human sausage logs
The splattering of meat on flesh
Enzymes, acids and fats

> trickle down into vats
> Nightmarish humanoid mower
> Behold, the chunk blower
>
> Your grinded mash
> of arms and legs
> Torsos and heads
> Now hamburger meat[89]

Extreme, gratuitous ultra-violence? Little more than the simplest inversion, switching one privileged meat for another, in the horrific inferno we laxly term modernized food industry.

NOTES

[1] Frederick Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, trans. Emile Burns, accessed October 1, 2013, http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1877/anti-duhring/ch15.htm. Cf. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (Grove Press, 2004), 25.

[2] David Kunzle, "Bruegel's Proverb Painting and the World Upside Down," *The Art Bulletin* 59 (1977): 198.

[3] Kunzle, "Bruegel's Proverb Painting," 201.

[4] James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (Yale University Press, 1990), 169.

[5] Cattle Decapitation, "Long-Pig Chef and the Hairless Goat," *To Serve Man* (Metal Blade, 2002).

[6] Rosemary Overell, "'[I] hate girls and emo[tion]s': Negotiating masculinity in grindcore music," *Popular Music History* 6 (2011): 204–205.

[7] Cf. Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A feminist-vegetarian critical theory* (Continuum, 2010).

[8] Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: A History of the Modern Sensibility* (Pantheon, 1983), 44.

[9] Cf. Elizabeth Grosz, *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections on Life, Politics, and Art* (Duke University Press, 2011), 12.

[10] Daniel Birnbaum and Anders Olsson, "An Interview with Jacques Derrida on the Limits of Digestion," trans. Brian Manning Delaney, *e-flux* 2 (2009), accessed October 1, 2013, http://www.e-flux.com/journal/an-interview-with-jacques-derrida-on-the-limits-of-digestion/.

[11] Cf. Cary Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?* (University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 157.

[12] Cf. Cary Wolfe, *Before the Law: Humans and Other Animals in a Biopolitical Frame* (The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 95. On naming the animal "animal," see Jacques Derrida, "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More To Follow)," trans. David Wills, in *Animal Philos-*

ophy: Essential Readings in Continental Thought, ed. Matthew Calarco and Peter Atterton (Continuum, 2004), 118.

[13] Birnbaum and Olsson, "An Interview with Jacques Derrida."

[14] Jacques Derrida, "Eating Well, or the Calculation of the Subject," trans. Peter Connor and Avital Ronell, in *Points... Interviews, 1974–1994,* ed. Elisabeth Weber (Stanford University Press, 1995), 278.

[15] Derrida, "Eating Well," 281.

[16] Derrida, "Eating Well," 281.

[17] Derrida, "Eating Well," 281.

[18] Derek Attridge, *Reading and Responsibility: Deconstruction's Traces* (Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 54.

[19] Cattle Decapitation, "Forced Gender Reassignment," *Monolith of Inhumanity* (Metal Blade, 2012).

[20] Cattle Decapitation, "Cattle Decapitation's 'FORCED GENDER REASSIGNMENT' Trailer #1 is up now!," October 3, 2012, accessed October 1, 2013, http://www.facebook.com/cattle decapitation/posts/379157178831934.

[21] Travis Ryan, quoted in Jonathan Barkan, "[Exclusive] Cattle Decapitation Release What Might Just Be The Most NSFW Music Video Ever," *Bloody Disgusting,* October 15, 2012, accessed October 1, 2013, http://bloody-disgusting.com/news/3195804/exclusive-cattle-decapi tation-release-what-might-just-be-the-most-nsfw-music-video-ever/.

[22] Black Shuck, October 15, 2012, comment on Islander, "Cattle Decapitation's New Video for 'Forced Gender Reassignment' Sets a New Standard for Foulness," *No Clean Singing*, October 15, 2012, accessed October 1, 2013, http://www.nocleansinging.com/2012/10/15 /cattle-decapitations-new-video-for-forced-gender-reassignment-sets-a-new-standard-for-foulness/comment-page-1/#comment-47790.

[23] Rhys Williams, "Video: Cattle Decapitation – 'Forced Gender Reassignment'," *Invisible Oranges*, November 28, 2012, accesed October 1, 2013, http://www.invisibleoranges.com/ 2012/11/video-cattle-decapitation-%E2%80%9Cforced-gender-reassignment%E2%80%9D/.

[24] The Smiths, "Meat Is Murder," *Meat Is Murder* (Rough Trade, 1985).

[25] The title alludes to a notable 1950 short-story-cum-*Twilight Zone* episode, written by Damon Knight, where a pig-like alien race brings "peace" to humanity by turning it into a food supply.

[26] Cattle Decapitation, "To Serve Man," *To Serve Man*.

[27] David Hume, "On Suicide," in *Selected Essays*, ed. Stephen Copley and Andrew Edgar (Oxford University Press, 1993), 319.

[28] Slavoj Žižek, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously* (Verso, 2012), 110.

[29] Derrida, "The Animal," 125–126.

[30] Cattle Decapitation, "Chummified," *Humanure* (Metal Blade, 2004).

[31] Marquis de Sade, *Juliette*, trans. Austryn Wainhouse (Grove Press, 1968), 890.

[32] I borrow the term from Villi Thorne, "Cattle Decapitation – Ten Torments for the Damned," *Volumes of Sin* April 1, 2012, accessed October 1, 2013, http://villithorne.blogspot.se/2012/04/review-cattle-decapitation-ten-torments.html.

[33] Cattle Decapitation, "Karma. Bloody. Karma.," *Karma.Bloody.Karma* (Metal Blade, 2006).

[34] Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 24–25.

[35] Cattle Decapitation, "Humanure," *Humanure*.

[36] Cattle Decapitation, "Suspended in Coprolite," *Karma.Bloody.Karma*.

[37] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Duke University Press, 2010), 96.

[38] Cattle Decapitation, "The Carbon Stampede," *Monolith of Inhumanity*.

[39] Cattle Decapitation, "A New Dawn," *Karma.Bloody.Karma*.

[40] Cattle Decapitation, "A Body Farm," *The Harvest Floor* (Metal Blade, 2009).

[41] Slipknot, "People = Shit," *Iowa* (Roadrunner, 2001).

[42] Cf., e.g., Tobias Dahlkvist, *Nietzsche and the Philosophy of Pessimism: Schopenhauer, Hartmann, Leopardi* (Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2007), 66–68.

[43] Cattle Decapitation, "Reduced to Paste," *Humanure*.

[44] Pierre Klossowski, *Sade My Neighbour*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Northwestern University Press, 1991), 87.

[45] Cattle Decapitation, "Tooth Enamel and Concrete," *The Harvest Floor*.

[46] Sade, *Juliette*, 768–769.

[47] Sade, *Juliette*, 769.

[48] Sade, *Juliette*, 770.

[49] Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 33.

[50] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 61.

[51] Derrida, "The Animal," 124.

[52] Cattle Decapitation, "Reduced to Paste," *Humanure*.

[53] Cattle Decapitation, "Total Gore?," *Karma.Bloody.Karma*.

[54] Cattle Decapitation, "Colonic Villus Biopsy Performed On The Gastrointestinally Incapable," *To Serve Man*.

[55] Cattle Decapitation, "Gristle Licker," *Monolith of Inhumanity*.

[56] Cattle Decapitation, "Lips & Assholes," *Humanure*.

[57] David Carney quoted in Gail A. Eisnitz, *Slaughterhouse: The Shocking Story of Greed, Neglect, and Inhumane Treatment inside the U.S. Meat Industry* (Amherst: Prometheus, 2007), 155.

[58] Cattle Decapitation, "Gristle Licker," *Monolith of Inhumanity*.

[59] Cattle Decapitation, "Polyps," *Humanure*.

[60] Cattle Decapitation, "Into the Public Bath."

[61] Cattle Decapitation, "A Body Farm."

[62] Žižek, *The Year*, 110.

[63] Cattle Decapitation, "The Earthling," *Humanure*.

[64] Žižek, *The Year*, 110.

[65] Derrida, "The Animal," 119.

[66] Cf. the (admittedly hilarious) segment in Astra Taylor's documentary *Zizek!* (2005) where it is suggested that vegetarians will turn into monkeys.

[67] Joanna Demers, "The Ethics of Apocalypse," *Evental Aesthetics* 1 (2012): 83.

[68] Cattle Decapitation, "A Body Farm," *The Harvest Floor*.

[69] Cattle Decapitation, "Suspended in Coprolite," *Karma.Bloody.Karma*; Cattle Decapitation, "Your Disposal," *Monolith of Inhumanity*.

[70] Cattle Decapitation, "A Living Breathing Piece of Defecating Meat," *Monolith of Inhumanity*.

[71] Cattle Decapitation, "Humanure," *Humanure*; Cattle Decapitation, "A Living Breathing Piece of Defecating Meat," *Monolith of Inhumanity*.

[72] Cattle Decapitation, "Success Is . . . (Hanging By The Neck)," *Karma.Bloody.Karma*.

[73] Divine Heresy, "Monolithic Doomsday Devices," *Bringer of Plagues* (Century Media, 2009).

[74] Cf. Dahlkvist, *Nietzsche*, 68–69.

[75] Ulrich Horstmann, *Das Untier: Konturen einer philosophie der Menschenflucht* (Verlag Johannes G. Hoof, 2004), 7. "[F]ortsetzende Litanei des Hauens, Stechens, Spießsens, Hackens, die Monotonie des Schlachtens und Schädelspaltens."

[76] Horstmann, *Das Untier*, 8. ("Der wahre Garten Eden – das ist die Öde.")

[77] Cf., e.g., Klaus Vondung, *The Apocalypse in Germany*, trans. Stephen D. Ricks (University of Missouri Press, 2000), 85–86.

[78] Cattle Decapitation, "Everyone Deserves to Die," *To Serve Man*.

[79] Cattle Decapitation, "Forced Gender Reassignment," *Monolith of Inhumanity*.

[80] Cattle Decapitation, "Success Is . . . (Hanging By The Neck)," *Karma.Bloody.Karma*.

[81] Žižek, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously*, 110.

[82] Levi R. Bryant, *The Democracy of Objects* (Open Humanities Press, 2011), 40.

[83] Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 21.

[84] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 104.

[85] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 104.

[86] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 109.

[87] Overell, "'[I] hate girls and emo[tion]s'," 206.

[88] Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 14.

[89] Cattle Decapitation, "Chunk Blower," *To Serve Man*.

Contempt, Atavism, Eschatology
Black Metal and Bergson's Porous Inversion

Louis Hartnoll

> The sun turns black, earth sinks into the sea,
> the bright stars vanish from the sky;
> steam rises up in conflagration,
> a high flame plays against heaven itself.[1]

From every distorted note and each commanding scream, first-wave black metal egests the heretical commitment to an unrealized and unrealizable history. In occupying one of the genre's most central and palpable themes, the sustained fidelity to an eradicated Norwegian culture, cut short long before it could become, displaces its listener-subjects from the solid ground upon which they stand. As shall be explored here, the relationship between this temporality and subjectivation—or rather, a subjectivation indivisible from this temporality– develops according to three distinct but interconnected operations: Born from a pure agonistic rage against *what is now*, black metal looks back to *what was* or *should have been* to ask the question of *what will be*. Beginning with an enraged contrast of presence and absence—the *why* of contemporary capitalism against the *where* of historic paganism—it revisits, inhabits, embodies, and projects out its own deadened mythology; at once testifying to a past, future, and present that simultaneously haven't ever, will never, and yet continue to exist. These tripartite movements attest to a polyphonic and polytemporal ontogenesis in which black metal's sonic timescape oscillates between *contempt*, *atavism*, and *eschatology*. But how might it be possible to excavate the implications of these three moments and unleash them onto philosophy? to position black metal as both the problem *in* which and the tool *with* which to think? to uncover the subjective test embedded in its darkened symbolism?

In order to answer these questions, we must initially turn to Bergson's seminal text *Matter and Memory*—particularly to its third chapter—and to the theoretical optic established therein. Through a speculative treatment on the *divided* natures of matter and spirit, he is able to outline the various durational operations of memory, the past's necessary contemporaneity with the present, and, ultimately, the impact of time on the subject's becoming. This is to say that the ontological understanding of memory, and its subsequent ramifications, forgoes the opportunity to examine a present that is never hermetically itself; in recognizing memory as both removed from and embroiled within a plane of images, we cannot simply define the present as the pure mathematical instant situated between past and future. Preemptively echoing, in a complicated tone, the Mayhem lyrics "the past is alive,"[2] Bergson's conceptual analysis outlines a past that in ceasing *to be now* has not ceased *to be*. Thus, in separating out matter and memory's purities in an abstracted, alchemical, and ontological experiment, Bergson then reconstitutes their division as one sustained through an *inverted* difference of degree. Positioned as central to both his thought and to the wider task of metaphysics, it is only as a result of this inversion that an aperture in the seemingly impenetrable division between virtual past and actual present is opened. Taken individually, matter and memory represent an unrelatable difference in kind; but, taken together, their inverted and embodied interconnection represents a contagious difference in degree. Acknowledging this instilled permeability between the two entities allows us to begin to reinscribe Bergson's speculations back onto the three temporal instances of black metal—conceptualized according to the atavism-image and eschatology-image, hyphenated to the present with the aid of contempt. In a restaging of its mythical history, its animation of an unrealized past—that is, its artificial creation in matter of memory—black metal pushes Bergson's inversion to its traumatic conclusion. Slicing the wound open, it eviscerates, inverts, and accelerates the matter-time relationship, allowing its contagious composition to infect one another.

BLACKENED BERGSONISM

It is only ever possible with Bergson to speak of multiple memory-s[3] that must be considered as a set of perpetually mutating and heteromorphous relationships between the subject and spirit as past. Contrary to its usage in the vernacular, 'memory' here is never *a memory*; it is not merely reducible to the cognitive recalling of forgotten or no-longer experiences. Rather, the Bergsonian conception of memory sits in a tripartite state constituted by habit-memory, representational-

memory, and pure memory.[4] To account for the variations between these three, we must first distinguish between the two different modes with which the past survives. Moving in different directions, the first takes the form of motor mechanisms, and the second the form of recollection.

Through an operation of prolongation, the past's survival reveals itself in its first form: habit-memory. Described as following "the direction of nature,"[5] this type of memory is wholly engaged with the practical activity of the living. By prolonging and repeating, its concern is with an impulsive and instinctive utility that aims to mechanistically apply the past as a tool to accommodate the subject to their surrounding material environment. The past, here, is necessarily intertwined with the immediate activity of the present: a past that acts and reacts according to the opportunities and threats that confront a body, Accordingly, it is in this sense that habit-memory is in ongoing exchange with matter itself. Concerning itself with an immediate response, we may wish to describe habit-memory as an inactive activity: wholly inactive in the sense that no concerted effort is required to engage with its automated processes, but wholly active in the sense that it remains in perpetual dialogue with things that act upon or can be acted upon. This form of embodied memory cannot be considered memory *par excellence*, it is rather "*habit interpreted by memory* and not memory itself."[6] To uncover what Bergson is alluding, and the ontological instrument with which black metal toys, we must turn to the second form in which memory makes itself felt, in representational-memory. This second instance of the past's survival operates through a movement of conservation; irrespective of "utility or of practical application, [representational-memory] stores up the past by mere necessity of its own nature."[7] It indexes and conserves, at each and every instant, the entirety of experience in all its detailed specificity, leaving to it its position of unique particularity. Stored in the form of memory-images, as the amassed collection of singular chronological imprints, pure memory provides the ontological support for representational-memory's intricate oscillations between the ineffectual living and the nascent deadened.

As Leonard Lawlor suggests, the reason that this form of memory may be considered any less natural than its counterpart is because it involves an inattention to life, "and not to pay attention to life is in a sense not only to be dead, but to be free of life's necessities."[8] The commands of life on a plane of matter, what we may broadly term 'the actual,' thus establishes itself in distinction to pure memory, what we may broadly term 'the virtual,' as an essentially removed and inattentive structure. If we are to capture such an entity as an image in the actual, an effort is required to remove oneself from corporeal demands and immerse oneself into the dead and disinterested past. It is accordingly only

through a leap into an autonomous past—in its amputated construction beyond the throws of life—that we are able to experience it as such; it is never simply a reliving of the past as it once was, never merely another iteration of it in the present, nor even a "rendering actual what is simply virtual and making the two identical,"[9] but can only be the concerted move to greet the past as it is. By momentarily hesitating and abandoning the exigencies of the mortal coil, we are permitted the opportunity to resolve ourselves in the depths of the virtual. Unlike habit-memory's survival in inactive activity, representational-memory requires the subject to actively inhabit the otherwise inactive: a step from the stability of matter into the fluidity of memory. But the cardinal difference here, between that which is prolonged and that which is conserved, is fundamentally one of *the repeated* and *the unrepeatable*, or, in terminology which we'll find appropriate to black metal, *the staged* and *the unrestageable*.

In recognizing the existence of these two surviving operations of the past, Bergson is able to subsequently expose the incoherence behind attributing to the present any ontological primacy. To conceive of the present as the instantaneous mathematical point situated between past and future, as the singular moment of existence between what no longer is and what is not yet (that is, the real between the false), is to overlook the past's endurance. The reason for this consideration is twofold: firstly, the present in itself is always already outside of itself, and secondly, to take what is given within the present as that which *is* is to confuse a part for the whole, a state of being for the entirety of being's becoming. The first fallacy suggests that to perceive the present is to be placed within the liminal space between the unfolding simultaneity of the immediate past and the immediate future. Bergson's challenge to this phenomenological presentism suggests that the experience of the present's duration is necessarily situated on both sides of its mathematical instant; it has "one foot in my past and another in my future. In my past, first, because 'the moment in which I am speaking is already far from me;' in my future, next, because this moment is impending over the future."[10] To hold that the present is occupied at the threshold between past and the future is to overlook its perpetually elongated existence. Any perception of the present is necessarily the instantaneous concurrence of what temporally *was*, *is*, and *can be*; the fleeting permanence of itself and its alterity. The present can only be itself if it is immediately placed beyond its own boundaries, contemporaneously internal and external to its own momental occurrence. "Nothing *is* less than the present moment, if you understand by that the indivisible limit which divides the past from the future. When we think this present as going to be, it exists not yet, and when we think it as existing, it is already past."[11] The second fallacy of the present's unique reality

revolves around Bergson's challenge to any narrow contraction of being to its mere snapshot; existence can be reduced neither to a fleeting instant nor to a set of material composites. Outlined early on in *Matter and Memory*, Bergson claims that reality is in a constant state of becoming, the totality of its unfolding state cannot be grasped in any of its divisible states. Therefore, the present as but one instant cannot be equated with the series of time's instances; *what is* is not synonymous with *what is present*; or in its negative assertion, what has been is not no longer; what has been *is*. Both commonplace fallacies stem from the habitual psychological direction of the mind; that is, the catatonic inability to recognize a reality beyond objects' present-ation to consciousness. At once it is the dual assumption made that holds the present to be that which *is* most alongside the past as that which both *was* and *is not*. The same belief that the past can be forgotten champions the false urgency of the present. On this point Deleuze comments:

> We have great difficulty in understanding the survival of the past in itself because we believe that the past is no longer, that it has ceased to be. We have thus confused Being with being-present. Nevertheless, the present *is not*; rather, it is pure becoming, always outside itself. It *IS* not, but it acts. Its proper element is not being but the active or the useful.[12]

By demonstrating the two movements of memory—habit and representational—and the particularity of the present—its restriction to a part, not the sum, of the whole—the requirement to think the real beyond the actual plane becomes wholly apparent. In assertions that reverberate in Burzum's *Lost Wisdom*, "Other planes lie beyond the reach / of normal sense and common roads / but they are no less real / than what we see or touch or feel,"[13] what Bergson is indicating is that there is an existence in a past, a pure memory, that subsists beyond perception. Whilst it "manifests itself as a rule only in the colored and living image which reveals it,"[14] that is, in its hyphenated tie to the actual through habit and representational-memory, pure memory must remain essentially and theoretically virtual. Pure memory, *qua* the virtual, may be felt in bodily motor mechanisms or glanced at in memory-images, but it is never met directly. This is because any immediate confrontation would necessarily assume the compromised form of an image, thus tying it to the actual. Once again severed from the actual, this in-itself past remains hermetically withdrawn from the praxial demands and capacities constituted within matter. But, if we are to treat the virtual as that which is devoid of all nascent potentiality, severed from the actual and accordingly confined to the ineffectual, then we would obscure the true nature of its being. Rather, it is as a

result of its "lack of interest and suspension of need that it can reveal itself as a *disruptive and creative power*,"[15] thus its very distance and freedom from 'life's necessities' account for an intensified and heightened strength. Because the virtual is not reliant on the actual in order to subsist, Bergson assigns to it an autonomy that adds to, not detracts from, its underlying capacities. The image, as branded with the mark of utility, seizes upon and interprets pure-memory's larval capacity in an embodied experience; however, this very transition jointly serves to reinforce and bridge such a divide. Bergson confirms:

> Memory actualized in an image differs, then, profoundly from pure memory. The image is a present state, and its sole share in the past is the memory from which it arose. Memory, on the contrary, powerless as long as it remains without utility, is pure from all admixture of sensation, is without attachment to the present, and is, consequently, unextended.[16]

In distancing pure memory from images, Bergson must also claim that it must exist in itself and cannot, by logical extension, be contained within something else. This critique is particularly pertinent to theories that would seek to house memory solely in the brain. The logical contradiction of the brain-as-container assumption rests in the contraction of the virtual to an image in the actual; again, it is not possible for a part to retain the whole. Pure-memory itself cannot reside within the brain; it is not reducible to the neurological operations that support ordinary cognitive functioning. It is, rather, the reverse. As Deleuze notes, "the only subjectivity is time, non-chronological time, grasped in its foundation, and it is we who are internal to time, not the other way round."[17] Shaped by the amassed / amassing moments of what has passed and bearing its entire weight down on the present, pure memory subsists not in an actual, chronological, forgotten, and nonexistent capacity but in a virtual, ontological, persistent, and coexistent one. The dark fabric of the Bergsonian unconscious is one thus constituted as a "nonpsychological reality,"[18] a realm that fundamentally doesn't belong to and yet is heavily invested in the individuation process; a share of the subject is never itself.

MATTER-MEMORY INVERSION

Once the divisions between the varying memory-s are established—that is, the ways in which the pure past in its non-chronological, self-sufficient state is divorced from the subject at the same time as it colors the actual through its connection in habit-memory and memory-images—Bergson then sets out to investigate

what the implications of a reality beyond the actual have for the conditions of existence. Ordinarily conceived, the material objects that surround a subject in the present moment are held to occupy a greater share and responsibility for the constitution of consciousness and thus, existence. Their proximity, tactility, and visibility lead one to assume their real presence, "the strictly determinate order of these objects lends to them the appearance of a chain, of which my present perception is only one link."[19] The closer an object is to a subject on that chain, the closer it is to being acted upon or against depending on whether it presents an opportunity or threat. With this in mind, the reverse holds true for the pedestrian comprehension of memory. The same logic of extension by which space becomes immediately opened necessitates that which appears most absent, i.e., memory, seems least present. Whilst contemplating space, matter presents itself as funda- mentally connected; however, with time, memory's interlinked chain does not make itself immediately known. To get from location w to location z, there is a requirement to move through x and y first, but to recall last week, one must jump over the days that stand in between—its intermediary links go wholly unnoticed. The capacity to make such leaps in the chain ordinarily leaves one with the belief that no chain exists. However, it is clear from the preceding analysis that Bergson's articulation of memory is one that necessarily exists and coexists *at the same time as* the present. This highlights a primary tension: It cannot be the case that that which shows itself to consciousness in matter constitutes the entirety of existence *and* that the pure past, *qua* the imperceptible virtual, exist. The two positions are logically incongruous. This problematic causes Bergson to assert, against the habitual direction of thought, that mere presentation to consciousness cannot thus be synonymous with existence. It is clear that, due to matter's logical connection in a chain, objects outside of one's immediate surroundings do not cease to exist; being positioned at w doesn't render the belief in existence of the obscured (by x and y) z moot. But why is it possible to insist upon the existence of objects beyond consciousness and yet refuse these conditions when referring to time? Rather, the nascent link between the subject's past and their present "is exactly comparable to the adherence of unperceived objects to those objects which we perceive; and *the unconscious* plays in each case a similar part."[20] At this stage, Bergson makes an enigmatic but absolutely essential move. By pushing the comparison of the temporally past and the spatially distant further he continues to suggest that "We have not, in regard to objects unperceived in space and unconscious memories in time, to do with two radically different forms of existence, but the exigencies of action are the *inverse* in the one case what they are in the other."[21] So crucial is this assertion that he describes it as the "capital problem of *existence*"[22] which, if we

were to allow it, would "lead us step by step into the heart of metaphysics."[23] In order to analyze this and excavate the methods by which black metal opens up into the past, it is necessary to break the sentence down into its two composite parts: the first speaks to the forms of existence, and the second to an inversion.

What Bergson requires is to posit two constitutive conditions that jointly inform psychic reality. These are: presentation in consciousness, and logical or causal connection. With these conditions, he navigates the logical incongruity referenced earlier; now it is the case that images amongst the actual and memory within the virtual both occupy a share of existence. But the peculiarity of this move lies in that after using the preceding half of *Matter and Memory* to separate out and purify the various aspects of space from time, he now reconnects the two via an extended difference of degree, and not solely in kind. This is to say, despite matter and memory's abstracted articulation as two indivisible entities, they ultimately remain joined together by a contiguous degree of difference. However, it is necessary to add, that these two conditions are unevenly fulfilled, i.e., they are in *inverse* proportions. Since matter, in the first instance, evidences its logical connection in the form of an unbroken and directly interlinked chain, Bergson considers it to fulfill the second condition (logical and causal connection) to a perfect degree; however, since it obeys particular determining rules, it can only ever present a small and imperfect fragment of itself to consciousness. Whilst one knows that object z is n meters away, when positioned at point w it is obscured by x and y. In contradistinction to this, memory's causal connection is less rigid as we move from link to link by way of a leap, providing a level of contingency in the chain; however, its presentation to consciousness necessarily remains perfect because its entire weight is felt in the act itself. The reason for this is because "The whole of our past psychical life conditions our present state, without being its necessary determinant."[24] As the subject acts, they act with the magnitude and contingency of the past. With this metaphysical inversion, Bergson invites an exchange. The body, situated between extended space and enduring time, is positioned at the very heart of the inversion. Located at the intersection, the subject acts as the gateway with which matter and memory open onto one another. Bergson has recourse to diagrammatically represent these doubled and interrelated conditions of reality—constituting a true difference of degree fulfilled in inverted measures—through his image of the cone.
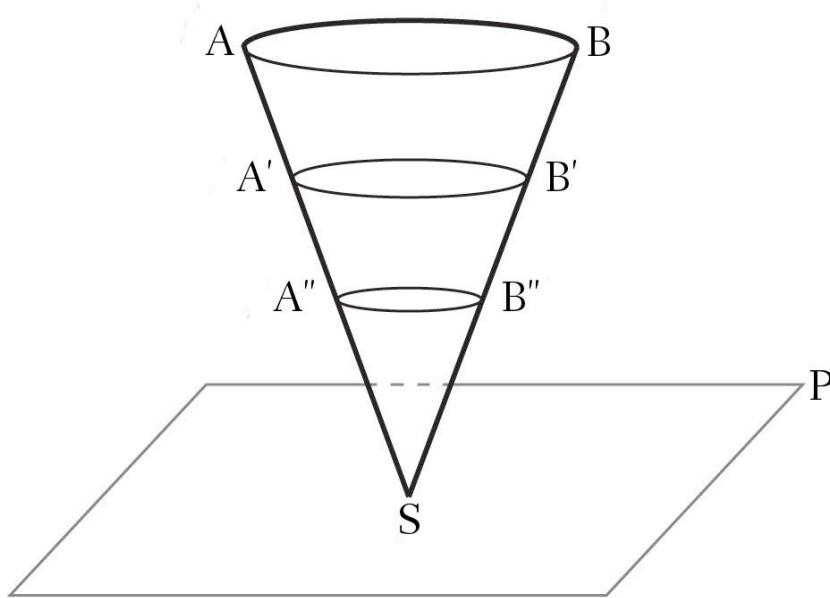
Figure 1. *Bergson's Cone*[25]

Motionlessly situated at the base of the cone is AB: the totality of the subject's past, pure memory. At the peak of the cone is S, denoting the subject engaged in sensori-motor activity located at the point of present and immediate consciousness. Restlessly shifting, the subject is shown at the intersection on the plane of matter, P. The levels A'B' and A"B" provisionally constitute two of an "infinite number of possible states of memory"[26] in a more or less contracted or dilated form. Point S is the instance in which, through the body's privileged position, the images which can be affected and the memory which can affect exchange; it is the dialogue between that which is rigid and that which is contingent, it is the collision between that which presents only a part and that which presents itself perfectly to consciousness. The difference in degree is shown not by means of a linear scale, moving from time on the one side to matter on the other; rather, it is demonstrated along two different axes, space along the horizontal and time along the vertical. To begin to bear the relationship this has to the sonic—and to darken, distort, and amplify Bergson's inversion—we must return to the speculations outlined earlier: black metal and all of its temporal intricacies.

CONTEMPT, ATAVISM, ESCHATOLOGY

As we briefly noted, black metal can be understood to move through three divided but interlinked temporalities: The first moment begins with a *contempt* for the present, the second moves into the *atavistic* past, and the third projects an *eschatological* to-come of the future. Passing sequentially from the question of absence, through the exploration of history, to the "hermeneutic horizon"[27] by a difference of degree, as we shall see, it displaces its subjects into an actual—virtual past— virtual future—actual . . . (∞) cycle. Mimicking the Bergsonian method of distillation and compounding, these distinct stages can first be understood individually before outlining their unfolding connection.

During the first moment of the black metal circuit, what we find is a move analogous to the Bergsonian ontological exposure of the fallacious habitual primacy of the present, driven in this instance, however, by the political motives of far right- and left-wing agendas. It is out of a pure contempt for both "liberal capitalism's eternal present"[28] and for the Christian Church's destruction of Norwegian pagan ancestry that we can come to see its own hate-fueled challenge to the primacy of the actual. Its vexed disdain, that is so attentively aggravated by the historico-cultural analysis which fails to locate the pervasive whereabouts of its mythological inheritance, condemns the contemporary to the unbearable scar of a lie. The present is not the momentary existence of the real, but rather the pervasion of the false after the real. The unending Now and the marked absence of what-should-be centers black metal's agonistic focus, its "permanence of conflict attests to the ever-receding utopian hope of the abolishing of the present, whilst also preserving a consistent and stabilized enmity to that present that gives the supplement of identity and integration."[29] In forming a simultaneous *acknowledgement* and *rejection* of the images that comprise the material composite of the actual, black metal adopts two tactics in its strategic attack on the contemporary Now; both beginning from the actual, one—through acknowledgement—remains, and the other—through rejection—departs. The first tactic is found in the construction of the music and in the events associated with its emergence. In black metal's impenetrable distortion can be found a sonic battle that seeks to turn the pure noise of its sound against the impure noise of capitalism / Christianity; "It is a static war, restless and bristling, but it is also a war of static. A war both by and against static: the buzzing howl nearly drowned out in the constant growl of late capitalist totality."[30] This destructive-materialist tendency is mirrored through the various church burnings, associated murders, and stylistic adoption of corpsepaint and other anti-religious iconography that constitute its inaudible composition.[31]

The cacophonic negativity is thus the utilization of material to destroy material, the internal collapse of the actual onto itself, the amplification of matter's autophagic tendencies. But it would be wrong to assign to this arsenal a purely limp and self-constricting efficacy; rather, it is from these points that black metal can make the movement into the second tactic and, accordingly, the second moment—atavism.

In the rejection of the actual, first-wave black metal drifts towards the purity of the dead past, a virtual-negativity. By looking to the material surroundings, it examines its cultural inheritance; the histories it emerges from come to greatly inform the history that it lives. Ulver's Erik Olivier Lancelot outrightly draws upon this connection by stating that his band's theme "has always been the exploration of the dark side of Norwegian folklore, which is strongly tied to the close relationship our ancestors had with the forests, mountains, and sea."[32] It is from the geographical and spatial coordinates that they, as hyphenated subjects, are positioned within that an access to the atavistic virtual becomes possible. The harsh climate that Ulver emerges from makes itself known not only in its territory, but also in its temporal extremity. As positioned within the Arctic Circle, there is an experience of winter's relentless polar nights and summer's unsettling midnight sun that gives the Norwegian months a certain degree of atemporality or lack of periodicity.[33] If there is an air of geosynchronicity to this music, then it must be thought of within these durational extremes. Darkthrone's track "A Blaze in the Northern Sky" has this to contribute:

> Where the days are Dark
> And Night the Same
> Moonlight Drank the Blood
> Of a thousand Pagan men[34]

These lyrics at once highlight the intersection between the darkened days of the Norwegian actual and the direction of the pagan virtual towards which it heads; it is from the material environment in which it emerges that admits the flight beyond its locale. Although most familiar to the music and writings of Varg Vikernes, throughout the entirety of first-wave black metal extensive references to pagan mythology can be found.[35] Songs and albums such as Enslaved's "Heimdallr", Forlorn's *The Crystal Palace,* Immortal's *Pure Holocaust*, and Mayhem's *De Mysteriis Dom Sathanas* are just some of the iterations of this pervasive and palpable theme. Evan Calder Williams, with reference to the Finnish band Vordr, suggests that the black metal can be thought of as "*the restaging of a*

past war that was to have happened yet which missed its chance. (The beginning of the end that didn't take place, the failed start.)"[36] This restaging of the unrealized develops an artificial memory-image, *qua* atavism-image, that urges the subject to jump into the virtual; artificial because it has never existed, memory-image because it's an embodied past that exists. A past that was never but still is; the histories that couldn't become but which breathe through fiction; an artifice more real than the real it attacks. Mayhem's "From the Dark Past" testifies to such a commitment; it opens:

> A face in stone . . . decayed by age
> A man who has returned to tell of his damnation
> Fears so deep, the mouth wide open
> The dream has died away before the dawn of this time[37]

Lines two and four speak to this restaging via the atavism-image: the leap into the mythic retold virtual, felt through a deceased and unrealized dream, and the greeting of the dark past from the specifics of the present. It is precisely here, in this transition from actual to virtual, from present to past, and from contempt to atavism, that it is possible to note the junction between Bergson's two disproportionately fulfilled conditions of existence. Taken in their pure, abstracted state, matter and memory remain both contradistinctive and alienated from one another, their ontology is comprised of two fundamentally different kinds of entities that cannot engage in dialogue; but, as has been noted, by rearranging their lived qualities into the two conditions of existence fulfilled to inverse degrees, Bergson pierces a hole in the impenetrable barrier between them. This is to say that the subject, from its position of privilege, sits at the centre of an inversion in which matter and memory collide. In its retrocausal move from present to restaged past, in its interconnection between contempt and atavism, in its embroiled tie of actual to virtual, black metal slashes the wound between these variously estranged entities open. By separating and reconnecting, via an inverted difference of degree, Bergson begins to expose the influence of one plane to another; but again, it is because of its contempt for the present and via its generated atavism-image that black metal starts to amplify this porous inversion. The fictions drawn from the remnants of history, the mythology displaced into the past simultaneously as past and absent present, and the active virtualizing of a reconstructed real navigate the matter to memory threshold. Constituted from and in the present, the atavism-image doesn't pass from actual to virtual but leaps into it; the already passed past is produced in its present; a past that coexists and is created with the unfolding

present. The experimental negativity born through rage seeps through the imme-
diate to contaminate the pure; the plane of the living spills into the weight of the
dead. However, it is at this stage that the third moment is encountered; the
movement towards the eschatological. Once relocated in an artificial, unrealized
past the call then becomes to realize a projected Ragnarök of the future. It is worth
returning to Williams on this point:

> Above all, black metal is war. It is fought under the banner of a desired final
> war to come: the striving march from *impure apocalypse of the present* to the
> *Pure Armageddon of the end*. To leave behind the messiness and imprecision
> of the Now, not by dreaming about the future but through a constant return
> to buried antagonisms . . . To become a fierce and directed manifestation of
> shared hatred toward the assumed positivity of what the order of the day
> is.[38]

At first this may seem to stand contra to the analysis so far presented, as is noted,
the future is not dreamed. But rather, William's assertion testifies specifically to
the unfolding sequential present-past-future-present circuit. First-wave black met-
al does not project immediately from the actual towards the eschatological future,
but it is via buried antagonisms that it can "march to war,"[39] as a step backwards
before moving forwards. That is, it is a desired future which makes itself felt in the
call to action only after it is experienced via an atavistic return. The unrealized
world that should have been is mapped onto a world that will. "If it can't recreate
Baldr's world it would rather humanity have no future."[40] Projecting the war-like *to
come* of the future beyond the immediacy of the actual's what can be acted upon /
against, black metal incites the eschatology-image. At once *felt* in the march and
distanced in the towards, the eschatology-image is sustained not in the immediate
opportunities and threats that surround the subject but rather it is constituted in
its deferred arrival.[41] Hovering between a self-abolishing eschatology *qua* unrealiz-
able abstraction and an embodied image *qua* realizable action and thus again,
between a virtual- and an actual-negativity, the eschatology-image engenders a
futurity that completes black metal's temporal cycle.[42] What is accordingly observ-
able is an extended circuit: starting from a position of contemptuous agonism
towards the present, moving through the intersection of Norway's material histo-
ries that, in turn, are propelled towards the future only to return to the actual in a
call to action. Contempt, in this equation, acts as the maddened negativity both
drives and anchors the departure, it does not constitute a contempt-image in itself
but acts as the hyphen which links atavism and eschatology to their -image. Locat-

ed very much within the actual, it is the angered knot which renders the solitude of past and future coherent. black metal's enduring hate, its disdainful detest for the immutable present, its agonistic attack on liberal-capitalism's Now drives the perpetual cycle in which it functions; its underlying, indissociable, and immediately recognizable negativity is the fuel that transitions and connects each sequential stage. In order to encapsulate this exchange, what is needed is this sequence reinscribed onto the order of blackened Bergson cone; the below diagram accordingly seeks to chart this topographical move along the mathematical coordinates of a Klein bottle.
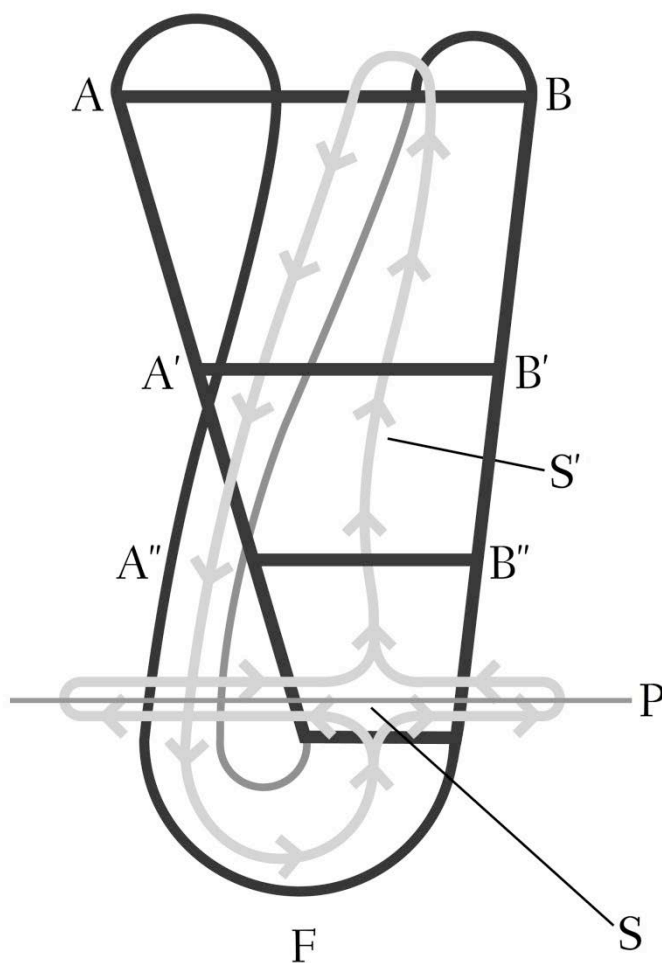

Figure 2. The Distorted Cone[43]

Points S, P, A through A" and B through B" remain the same referents as in Bergson's original cone: the subject, plane of matter, and the various states, levels, and contractions of pure memory. The first additional point of note, S', shows the subject directed along black metal's present-past-future-present circuit; moving from actual towards virtual past, from virtual past towards virtual future—shown in the second additional point, F—only to fold back onto the actual by way of the contemptuous call to action against the Now. At the extreme of one axis is the rhythmic haunting of a history that simultaneously has never existed and yet still exists; at the other extreme is the projection of a cadaverous past onto the battle cry for the future. Its intersecting axis bears the force of these movements, the virtual-negativity now surrounding the subject in their hyphenated position. Taken together, these two isolated virtuals jointly constitute a non-psychological ontology that converses with the mechanics of individuation; pure past and pure future are fundamentally separate from and linked to the subject's becoming. The centre of the inversion, located at the virtual-actual-virtual junction above, subjects past and future to the influence of matter and vice versa; positioned as separate yet inseparable conditions, neither one being a weak version of nor entirely divorced from the other. Upended and reversed, the actual and virtual have their insides turned out and outsides in; reconnected together by a true, inverse difference of degree they are now shown in their capacity for radical, contagious permeability. It is an exposure of matter to memory *as well as* memory to matter. In black metal's subjection of pure past to the artificial images drawn from matter, Bergson's cone mutates to allow interiority and exteriority to converse. Through it, the gates open both to a spectral and speculative past and an unwritten future that is jointly constituted *from*, *prior to*, and *against* the contemporary present. The subject of / to / in black metal is pulled between these extreme temporalities—mythic past and war-like future—that stretch out beyond the plane of matter only to come crashing back in a tirade of rage. In displacing matter as memory and using memory against matter, past, future, and action expose themselves and becoming exposed to the another; Bergson's porous inversion, the very fissure that admits memory-matter reciprocity, is pried open to allow the radical contagion between an artificial virtual and a disdained actual. Matter, here, does not become pure past, just as pure past does not become pure future—all have uniquely distinguishable characteristics—but together they become the momentary hesitations in a cyclical flow of blackened being. With its feet on the ground and its head tilted back, black metal howls the command of time.

NOTES

[1] *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Carolyne Larrington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 11. This particular stanza is directly referenced in Forlorn's "Ragnarok," from *The Crystal Palace* (Head Not Found, 1997).

[2] Mayhem, *Pagan Fears*, CD (Deathlike Silence, 1994). All lyrics cited henceforth are taken from *Encyclopedia Metallum: The Metal Archives,* http://www.metal-archives.com.

[3] The term 'memory-s' is used here to denote 'memory' as a shifting plural, a set that contains distinguishable particulars united by a common relation. Not, for which the term 'memories' would suggest, as in the collection of a series of different but consistently similar singulars.

[4] John Mullarkey, *Bergsonism and Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999).

[5] Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and William Scott Palmer (New York: Zone Books, 2005), 88.

[6] Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 84 [sic].

[7] Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 81.

[8] Leonard Lawlor, *The Challenge of Bergsonism* (London: Continuum, 2004), 38.

[9] Keith Ansell Pearson, *Philosophy and the Adventure of the Virtual: Bergson and the Time of Life* (London: Routledge, 2002), 176.

[10] Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 138.

[11] Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 150.

[12] Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Zone Books, 2011), 55 [sic].

[13] Burzum, *Lost Wisdom*, CD (Cymophane, 1993).

[14] Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 133 [sic].

[15] Pearson, *Philosophy and the Adventure of the Virtual: Bergson and the Time of Life*, 182 [italics added].

[16] Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 140–141.

[17] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: Continuum, 2012), 80. With this comment, we are able to correct Jean Hyppolite's assessment that the Bergsonian thesis can be reduced to "I endure therefore I am." It is not I that endures but endurance that is I; I am allowed to endure; endurance conditions the I. Endurance *is* therefore *I* am. Jean Hyppolite, "Various Aspects of Memory in Bergson," trans. by Athena V. Colman, in Leonard Lawlor, *The Challenge of Bergsonism* (London: Continuum, 2004), 112 [112–127].

[18] Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 56.

[19] Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 145.

[20] Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 145 [sic]. Indeed the movement of inversion is so fundamental to Bergson's thinking that elsewhere he suggests that to philosophize *'is to invert the habitual direction of the work of thought*.' Henri Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Thomas Ernest Hulme (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 41.

[21] Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 146 [italics added].

[22] Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 146.

[23] Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 146–147.

[24] Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 148.

[25] Adapted from: Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 162.

[26] Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 168.

[27] Benjamin Noys, "'*Remain True to the Earth!*': Remarks on the Politics of Black Metal," in *Hideous Gnosis: The Black Metal Symposium 1*, ed. Nicola Masciandaro (CreateSpace, 2009), 120 [105–128].

[28] Evan Calder Williams, "The Headless Horsemen of the Apocalypse," in *Hideous Gnosis: The Black Metal Symposium 1*, ed. Nicola Masciandaro (CreateSpace, 2009), 133 [129–142].

[29] Noys, "'*Remain True to the Earth!*'," 120.

[30] Williams, "The Headless Horsemen of the Apocalypse," 141.

[31] It is not my intention to elaborate on these well-documented points further. For a more detailed examination of the role of black metal's sonic aesthetic as a duplication of the impure noise it struggles against, see the Williams article referenced below. 'A war both *by* and *against* static: the buzzing howl nearly drowned out in the constant growl of late capitalist totality. For despite its hailing back to the absent origin, black metal is the sound—and politics, for there is no divorcing of the two—of this infernal and eternal present turned up and back on itself.' Williams, "The Headless Horsemen of the Apocalypse," 141 [sic].

[32] Eric Lancelot in Michael Moynihan and Didrik Søderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground* (Washington: Feral House, 2003), 175.

[33] Hunt Hunter Hendrix, "Transcendental Black Metal: A Vision of Apocalyptic Humanism," in *Hideous Gnosis: The Black Metal Symposium 1*, ed. Nicola Masciandaro (CreateSpace, 2009), 53–65.

[34] Darkthrone, *A Blaze in the Northern Sky*, CD (Peaceville Records, 1992) [sic].

[35] This is not to suggest that pagan referencing cannot be found elsewhere—references can also be found in the work of Behemoth and Enthroned for example—but that in first wave Norwegian black metal there is a very particular movement that cannot be found elsewhere precisely because of its geographical specificity.

[36] Williams, "The Headless Horsemen of the Apocalypse," 134 [sic].

[37] Mayhem, *From the Dark Past,* CD (Deathlike Silence, 1994).

[38] Williams, "The Headless Horsemen of the Apocalypse," 130 [sic].

[39] Darkthrone, *Majestic Desolate Eye*, CD (Moonfog Productions, 1996).

[40] Nick Richardson, "Looking Black" in *Black Metal: Beyond the Darkness* (London: Black Dog, 2012), 159 [148–169].

[41] Elsewhere I have argued that the eschatology-image begins to allow the possibility of thinking through of a pure future not found in *Matter and Memory*. A pure future, that following Deleuze's crystal-image, contorts the present as it is its future. It is necessary for a new present to arrive in order for the old present to pass, and to do so simultaneously as

it is present.

[42] In Noys' aforementioned article he articulately outlines the dialectical consequences of unrealizable war, the antagonistic impossibility of an unobtainable Ragnarök; suggesting that "On its own criteria should Black Metal triumph as the recovery of a true aesthetic politics of the 'impossible past' it would then disappear . . . The fact that this does not and cannot occur is what *maintains* Black Metal as an abstract aestheticisation of politics in the service of a dialectic that can only produce further 'concrete abstractions.'" Noys, "'*Remain True to the Earth!*'," 120 [sic].

[43] Bergson's original cone is here low-lighted for reference—of which the peak has been dilated and the base folded in on itself. For ease of demonstration it has been drawn as a 2D cross section.